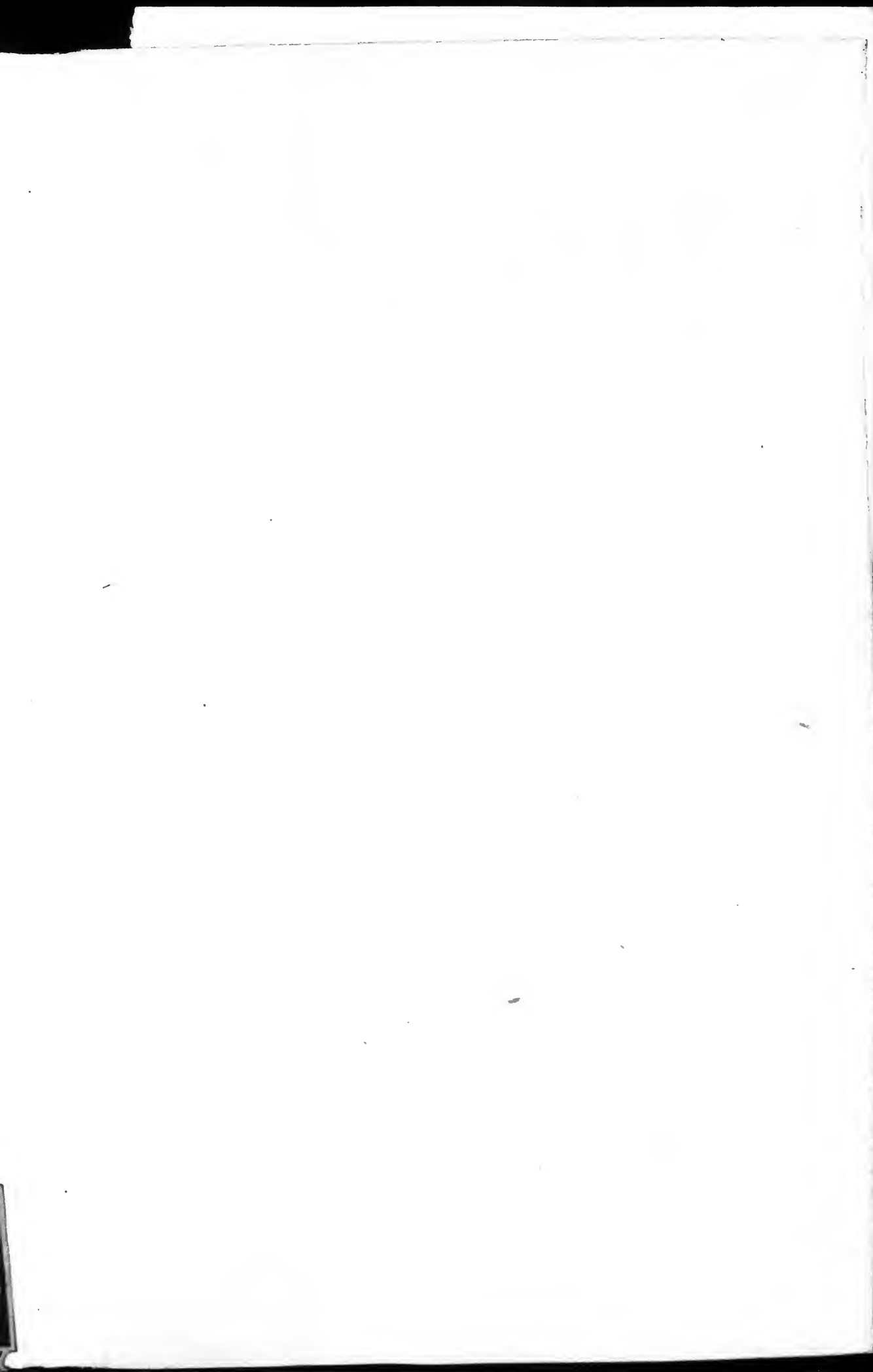


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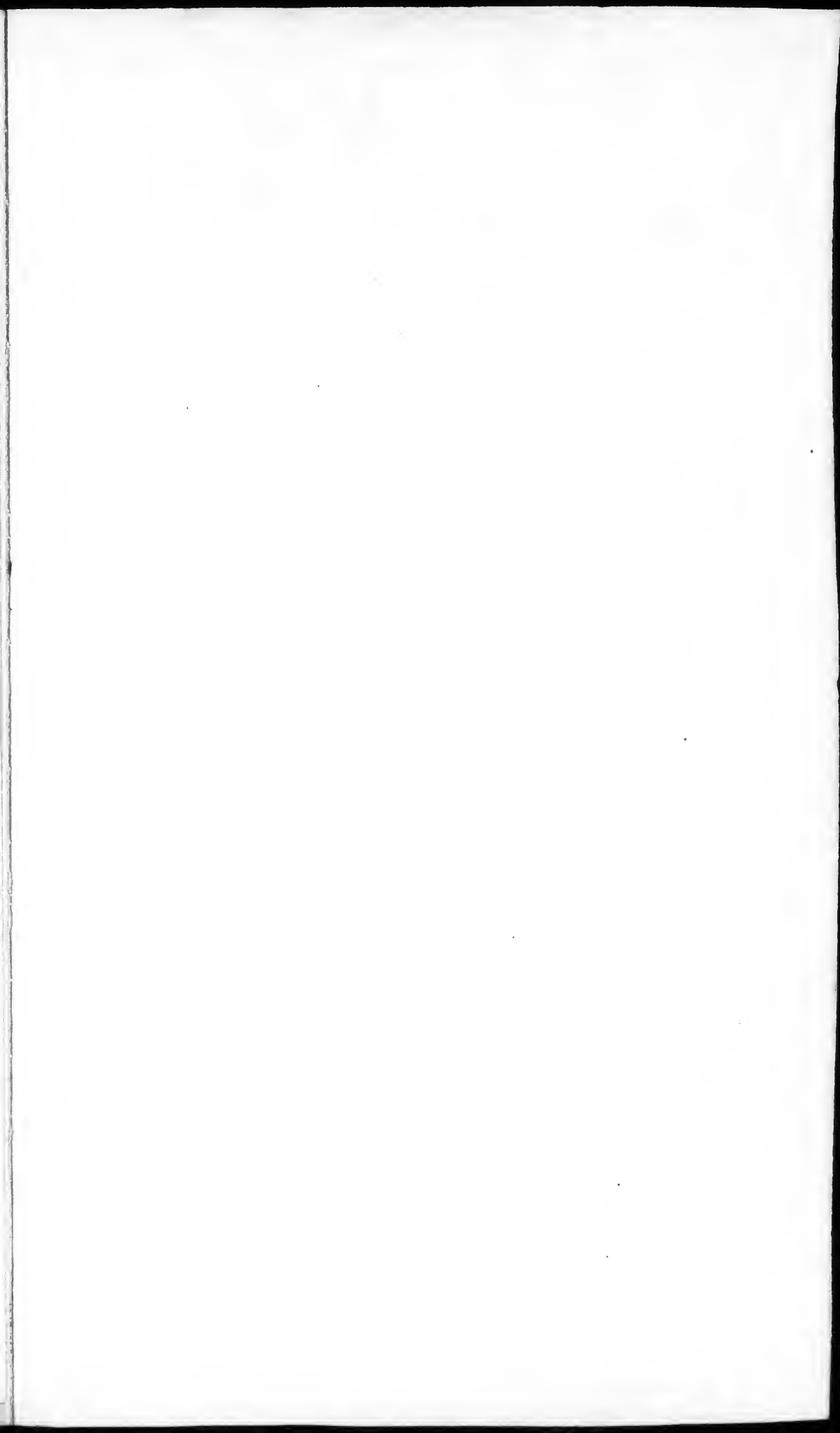
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# CONTENTS.

---

## CHAPTER I.

	Page
INTRODUCTION.....	1

## CHAPTER II.

COVETOUSNESS CONSIDERED IN ITS PRINCIPLE.....	14
---	----

## CHAPTER III.

THE NATURE AND INDICATIONS OF COVETOUSNESS...	32
---	----

## CHAPTER IV.

THE PRACTICAL DEVELOPEMENT OF COVETOUSNESS...	68
---	----

## CHAPTER V.

THE ANTICHRISTIAN CHARACTER OF COVETOUSNESS..	105
---	-----

## CHAPTER VI.

COVETOUSNESS PREJUDICIAL TO PERSONAL PIETY.....	138
---	-----

## CHAPTER VII.

COVETOUSNESS A PUBLIC EVIL. ....	160
----------------------------------	-----

## CHAPTER VIII.

HINTS ON THE DETECTION OF COVETOUSNESS .....	180
--	-----

## CHAPTER IX.

SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CORRECTION OF COVETOUSNESS	210
--	-----



# ON COVETOUSNESS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION.

God is made known to us, that we may love and imitate him. It might therefore be naturally expected, that, in all his revelations of himself, we should find a peculiar impressiveness given to those aspects of his character which have the most direct tendency to soften, to win, to endear. And such is the fact; for, throughout the varied and comprehensive range of the Divine manifestations, the benignity of God is presented to us with remarkable prominence.

Of this doctrine the theology of nature is full; and it is pleasing to observe, as modern science opens to us new fields of research and new stores of information, that the attributes of the Divine mind, apparent upon a superficial observation of nature, are, in the utmost beauty, harmony, and proportion, found to pervade the entire creation. From the time of Ray and Derham down to that of Paley, these views were continually enlarging, and even

Paley has now become almost obsolete, from the number and variety of illustrations which subsequent discoveries have supplied.

Where there is satisfactory evidence of design, there must have been a designer. This is the fundamental argument of natural theology; but, in searching out the proofs of design, we receive assurances on every hand, that the Being after whom we inquire, "in these his lowest works," must be possessed, not of infinite wisdom alone, but equally of unlimited benevolence. The object to which the entire design of creation tends, and for which it is so beautifully adapted, is the enjoyment of all sentient creatures.

It is conceivable, that while the evidence of design was irresistible, the proofs of benevolence might have been wanting, or at least, so faint and feeble, as to have left it doubtful whether the Creator was at all concerned for the happiness of those whom he had made. The human body, for example, might have exhibited all the organs and senses which it now possesses, each adapted to the impressions and influences of outward nature, and so far the proof of design would have been satisfactory. But this adaptation might have ministered rather to the discomfort than to the delight of man. The relation of sound to the organ of hearing might have existed, and every sound might have been harsh or discordant. The organ of vision might have been fitted to receive the rays of light, but had it been more sensitive, or had they been less subtle, the impinging of each upon the visual nerve, would probably have produced perpetual torture. Every taste might have been bitterness; every touch, a sting; every odour, a stench. But, while in general the

various parts of the body are harmoniously united, and its powers are evenly balanced, the world is crowded with objects agreeably suited to the human senses; and the senses are so delicately tuned, and so artfully fitted to external objects, that each daily proves an avenue of inexpressible pleasure.

A large proportion of the natural productions with which we are acquainted, have no hitherto ascertained proximate design, beyond the enjoyment of man. The splendour of crystallized minerals, the hues and odours of flowers, the size and structure of other vegetable products, the brilliant plumage of birds, and, above all, the exquisite beauty and amazing variety of form and function in the insect tribes, seem solely intended to minister to human joy. And though the eye, as the noblest organ of sense, has the most abundant and diversified provision, the inferior senses are not left destitute. Softness, and sweetness, and fragrance, and music, invite sentient man forth from himself, to perpetual festivity.

The microscopic discoveries of modern times have opened to us new worlds, full of vitality and sensation, where beings of form more varied, and structure more singular, than the larger specimens

of the animal creation, sport in the most extraordinary numbers, and apparently with ample powers of sensation and sensible enjoyment; so that, as far as we can trace the hand of God, from the hugest leviathan, down to the animalcule whose ocean may almost literally be enclosed in the hand of man,—from the frailest ephemeron, up to the mightiest combination of muscular energy, “the earth is full of his goodness,” and “these are but a small part of his works.”

Small and comparatively low, however, as they are, they fairly exhibit the spirit of the whole creation. Intellect, affection, imagination, and the still higher powers of moral perception and moral emotion, except so far as they are desecrated from their original dignity, are all pregnant with the same beauty and charm. And, dimly as is let in upon us the light of other sensible worlds, and especially the light of the spiritual world, every glimpse serves but to confirm the truth already suggested by observations on our own, that "the Lord is good, and his tender mercies are over all his works."

It is true, that to this pervading law of benevolence there are many apparent exceptions. But we have every reason to believe that were our powers of penetration and apprehension more vigorous or matured, we should without difficulty be able to reduce the whole to the most perfect harmony. Limited as is our present range of vision, and feeble as are our faculties, there are yet a large number of the calamities of life, the reasons of which we are able to discern, and, so far, we find them in reality, parts of the same perfect scheme of benevolence. Evils, for example, of a more obvious character, are placed as guards upon evils greater in themselves but less open to observation. In this way, some calamities act as preventives, while others, in diverse modes, operate as correctives, or restoratives; and, even where the suffering of an individual is not, and cannot be of advantage to himself, it is, in many cases, not difficult to perceive how it ministers in the highest sense, to the benefit of others. So that every analogy which we are capable of instituting between what we partially understand, and what is

completely unknown, leads us to the conclusion, that the plan of the universe is ONE ; that the mind that planned and sustains it, is ONE ; and that one unbounded benevolence is the spirit which actuates and arranges all things.

Yet, after all possible deductions are made from their amount, there still remain a number of anomalies, which, were we left to our own researches, might surprise and perplex us ; we turn, therefore, from the manifestations of God in his works, to the revelation of his word. And here we find the Divine benevolence amply vindicated. Here, whatever is mysterious in the world of nature and providence, so far as the case requires, at least in its principles, is explained to us ; while, beyond all such discoveries, we are invited to contemplate the master-piece of Divine wisdom and love, the marvellous plan, and its still more marvellous execution, for the restoration and happiness of an apostate world. "Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins," 1 John iv. 10.

The position which the subject of redemption occupies in the sacred volume, indicates to us, not only its importance, but also the peculiar attributes of God, which we are specially invited to contemplate. And between the views thus systematically suggested, and all the isolated declarations of the Divine character, there is the most perfect correspondence. God is designated the Eternal, the Almighty, the Holy, the Just, the True, yet it is not one of the attributes to which these terms refer that he has chosen as his NAME. But while he is, on the one hand, described as "loving, tender, pitiful," on the other, he is brought out from the

crowd of his glories, under the appellation most affecting to human hearts. "God is LOVE."

We turn from the works to the book of God, for the solution of doubts respecting the ordinary administration of the Divine government, but where shall we seek the exposition of the grand mystery of that book, the mystery of love? That, indeed, "passeth knowledge." No success in his beneficent plans can intrinsically augment the glory of God; nor any failure, if such be possible, diminish his enjoyment. Of his love, there can never be an equal reciprocation. In the first feeble gush of an infant's affection, we find some resemblance and some approach to the flame of "the rapt seraph that adores and burns;" but, the benevolence of the Divine mind is infinitely and for ever beyond the utmost limit and sphere of the loftiest and most intense ardour which can glow in a created spirit. As in his attributes in general, so in this especially, he is "THE UNSEARCHABLE;" and of it, in its motives and in its measure, in its plans, and in its conduct, in its efficiency, and in its tenderness, the most exalted of finite intellects may justly say, "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is high, I cannot attain unto it."

This then is at once the Creator and the type of original man. "God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him," Gen. i. 27. Can we conceive of a more magnificent creature? Modelled on Divinity, moulded by infinite skill, inspired with life directly from the source of all energy and vitality, crowned with the approving blessing of God, endowed with universal sovereignty over the beautiful and untainted world, placed in a royal domain of perpetual delight, and surrounded

by the homage of universal nature. To the philosophic observer, nothing short of the testimony of God could render it credible that the sordid being who now bears the name of man, was ever so unspeakably noble. It might be some apology for the eulogists of this fallen nature, if, in its present constitution and habits, something could still be found of the spirit of original love. But the contrary is the fact; and no rebuke to human pride can be more severe or more unequivocal, than the universal and pervading selfishness of man.

Other sins there are, which belong to peculiar complexions and temperaments; but this is one from which no constitution of nature is excepted; still less is it confined to any class of individual or social habits. The same spirit predominates in civilized as in savage life, in the meditative as in the active, in men of cultivated intellect and manners, as in the uncouth and stupid. And though in polished society its foulest and most affronting forms are studiously concealed, and the tongue is taught the language of benevolence, the heart is meanwhile as cold and narrow as in rude and untaught men; and, beyond the bare sin of selfishness, the world imperatively requires a habitual dissimulation, which yet deceives none, because it is practised alike by all.

The wisdom of former ages, as expressed in those ancient adages which have been received and approved from generation to generation, and which we impress upon our children as practical rules of the most tried experience, has upon it the same taint as the current manners of our own times. Some of the most applauded and successful systems of education are those which most fully bring into

operation the native selfishness of the human heart.

Indeed, selfishness is the predominant characteristic of "the world." Business, amusements, fashions, are all but different modes for its display. The man of approved prudence and the indiscreet speculator, the avaricious and the prodigal, the fashionable idler, and the acute, plodding creature of business, the orator of one stage, and the buffoon of another, widely diverse as are their habits, are still moved by the same spring, and drudge in subservience to the same sordid principle. We have indeed a fictitious vocabulary, out of which we cull terms to impose upon ourselves and others, and our success is not inconsiderable. This, however, is short-sighted policy. An alias in a criminal court is always pregnant with suspicion against the accused; and, before the tribunal of conscience, to which sooner or later all our actions will be brought, the very solicitude to secure respectable designations for the prevailing habits of men of the world, will prove a strong presumption against their innocence. Let us only do ourselves the justice to recollect the very obvious truth, that the morality of any action or course of conduct must remain perfectly unaffected by the terms which we employ to describe it, and, unless our passion for self-delusion be unusually strong, we shall perceive how truly the spirit of the world merits this condemnation. The systems of morals invented by men, except so far as they are indebted to the Bible, present the same character; in general, they not only do nothing to correct the evil in question, but assume it as the leading principle of their instructions. The sentiment of a well-known unbeliever of a former age, (Volney,) though

not always so intelligibly expressed, may substantially be found in them all. "All wisdom, all perfection, all virtue, all philosophy consist in the practice of the following maxims, which are founded upon our natural organization—Reverence thyself—Instruct thyself—Moderate thyself—Live for thy fellow-creatures, in order that they may live for thee." If there are any exceptions to the spirit of this counsel, they are to be found only in the writings of visionaries, and are confessedly founded upon mere abstractions.

But christianity is designed to give back to man the forfeited image of his God, and it is therefore a religion of love. It is so in its precepts, it is so in its sacrificial provision, it is so in its efficient means, it is so in its effectual working. So far as it opens and expands the human heart, and impresses upon it its own character of vicarious and sacrificial benevolence; so far as its subject ceases to live for himself, and becomes "the light of the world," and the centre of blessing to the circle by which he is surrounded; so far as he spends and is spent for the accomplishment of the Divine plans of mercy, and the welfare of the universal family of man; so far, and so far only, does the blessed system of the gospel prove effectual to its proposed ends.

And is this the character of those who are favoured with an evangelical ministry? Is it that of christian professors in general? That our beneficent religion, in the institutions of nations professedly christian, has extensively displayed its benign energy, it would be a sin to deny. That there are those who live under its genuine influence, and habitually show forth in their lives its gracious fruits, we ought thankfully and in religious joy to acknowledge. But

we are not the less compelled to admit, and that with sorrow and shame, that of the multitudes who bear the name of Christ, the sharers, in any eminent degree, of this part of his character, are comparatively few. The men of self-sacrifice, let us confess it, without bitterness, but in true humility, are rather the exceptions to the rule which obtains in the church, than the indications of the rule itself. The man of exemplary, devoted, self-sacrificing benevolence is a phenomenon; and, however honoured his name may be, when the world is no longer blessed by his labours, yet during his life, it is strange, if, even among those who ought most fully to appreciate his virtues, he does not share the reproach of his Master. Or, if this should not be the case, the wonder excited by his zeal and heroism is of itself a plain proof how far short we generally fall of the exalted benevolence of the gospel of Christ. We are startled by the beneficence of him who is what, in our several spheres, we each ought to be; and, in after ages his name is canonized, who, in spirit at least, would have been but an ordinary christian, had the church been fully imbued with the mind of Christ.

Yet, though we have much cause for humiliation, we have none for discouragement. Is it too much to hope that, even now, there is some improvement in the tone of our christianity? The incursions which in these times have been made upon the kingdom of darkness, have trained and brought out a number of heroic and apostolic spirits, who have not counted their lives dear unto them, so that they might fulfil among the heathen the ministry which they have received of the Lord Jesus. This is an auspicious sign of our times. We are no longer

surprised at missionary zeal and enterprize. The age of controversy is past; the age of apathy which succeeded it, has past; a brighter era has risen upon us. Christianity is at length recognised as a religion of universal and constraining love; and we shall bequeath to our children the interests of a thousand churches in other lands which till our day had no existence. "Not unto us, not unto us, O Lord: but to thy name give glory."

Yet, gratifying as are these facts, it is not to be concealed that, for the most part, our zeal is superficial, and is maintained rather by renewed impulses from without, than by the steady increase of personal and inward religion. Never were so many and so great efforts necessary to give it principle and depth, to render it less the result of occasional stimulus, and more that of strong and abiding christian love. Would we prevent the reaction of native selfishness, the remedies must be more energetic. We must refuse any compromise with ourselves. The process must not be merely palliative; nothing will suffice short of the attempt at actual extirpation.

Whether therefore we are led to believe that, by God's blessing, the church is advancing in the spirit of true benevolence, or whether we arrive at the opposite conclusion; whether our predominant emotion be that of hope or of regret, the question of duty is not ambiguous. It becomes every christian to investigate his own religious condition, and to employ the most effectual means for the correction of the selfishness which yet may lurk in his heart. And, on the other hand, it is fitting that those who are capable of exerting an influence over others, be that influence small or great, should

seize every opportunity for elevating the tone of individual piety, and correcting the spiritual evils which affect christian communities. The effort to reform what is outward has too much engrossed our attention. "The chambers of imagery" yet remain to be purged. With these impressions, the following thoughts are affectionately, and with much solicitude, presented to the church of Christ.

"Who then is on the Lord's side?" Who is he that longs to be conformed to the image of the Son of God? Where is the man that will deal faithfully with his own heart, neither closing his eyes against the light that reveals its depravity, nor attempting to excuse or palliate his actual guiltiness? Where is the christian who longs for perfect simplicity, for undeviating oneness of design, for a full deliverance from "this present evil world?" Where is the heart, that, in order to this, is willing to make every sacrifice, and to submit to every endurance? Where is he who esteems the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, having respect to the recompence of reward! Reader, art thou the man? Is thine eye single? Canst thou, dost thou pray, "Cleanse thou me from secret faults. Create in me a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within me—May I be delivered from laying up treasure upon earth—May I set my affections on things above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God." While thy neighbours, in solicitude and discontent, are inquiring, "Who will show us any good?" art thou daily, hourly, saying, "Lord, lift upon me the light of thy countenance." Doth thy soul continually exclaim, "The Lord is my portion," and art thou refusing to be satisfied,

till thou awake with his likeness? If so, let me have thy companionship in these following thoughts: and if, by the prevalency of thy prayers, they should be rendered useful to thine own spirit, do not refuse the aid of thy intercession on behalf of him, whom God has made a channel of good to thee.

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## CHAPTER II.

## COVETOUSNESS CONSIDERED IN ITS PRINCIPLE.

AN inordinate affection for wealth is one of the most common forms of selfishness. It is usually described by the term COVETOUSNESS; and will supply, especially as it affects christian professors, the topics for remark and illustration in the following pages. Its principle, its nature, its development, its sinfulness, with suggestions for its discovery and correction, will be severally brought before the reader, with such a degree of discrimination only, as may appear most likely to further the practical design of the whole. The first of these will be the subject of the present chapter.

“When lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin,” James i. 15. This is the natural order of evil,—corrupt affection first, actual transgression as its result. But where sin is deliberate and habitual, the understanding, as well as the heart, must be perverted; and errors of affection are preceded and occasioned by errors of judgment. No one desires to be rich who does not regard wealth as a good; no one desires it inordinately who does not value it unduly. The principle of covetousness, therefore, is the erroneous estimation of wealth; and, though incorrect opinions on this subject are confirmed by

the reaction of corrupted affections, yet it is clear that this state of the heart is originally determined by the decisions of a darkened and perverted understanding.

Of itself, wealth is neither a good nor an evil. Whether it will prove one or the other, must depend upon circumstances extrinsic of its own nature. A solitary man, placed upon a large island as its undisputed possessor, though its sands supplied him with gold, and its alluvial soil with gems, would be neither the better nor the worse for all the riches of this kind which he might accumulate. The skin of an animal, or the esculent fruit of a tree, would be the most desirable of possessions, simply because they are appropriate to physical need. In society, however, gold and silver are valuable, inasmuch as they may be converted into the necessities and the luxuries of life. A similar conventional value is attached to a paper currency; and because, by the usage of society, an article intrinsically worthless may administer to the wants and the comfort of man, it comes to be estimated as equivalent to the amount of real money which it represents. Could all men agree upon the medium and rate of exchange, accident alone could render it of any importance whether commodities were procured by cowries or dollars, by the brittle iron of ancient Sparta, or the yet more perishable paper of modern times.

Wealth, therefore, is only valuable as a means. No truth is more obvious to the philosopher and enlightened statesman, and yet it is a truth which practically is often lost sight of. This occasions a most striking example of incorrect estimation. Whoever regards wealth as a good *per se*, without

distinct and primary reference to its uses, entertains an opinion than which nothing can be more absurd. The possessor of a large quantity of current coin, considered of itself, is no richer, properly speaking, than the possessor of an equal number of unsightly stones; and, if his desires do not go beyond their mere accumulation, it is exactly as rational to amass withered leaves as any conceivable amount of bonds and securities.

The avaricious man, he who has no object except the accumulation of money, who, though he has wealth, refuses to employ it, and feels far more satisfaction in hoarding it than in its lawful use, is actually guilty of this folly. He mistakes the means for the end. There are different degrees in which this error of estimate may obtain; and though few comparatively carry it out to its extreme of positive and unmitigated avarice, there are many, and of these some professing christians, who, in a lower measure, are under the same delusion. A certain class of individuals, not ordinarily reputed avaricious, have formed their habits upon the assumption that, in itself, wealth is a good. A man of this order wastes the whole of his life in the eager pursuit of riches, but beyond their simple acquisition he has no distinct ideas. He spends all his time and directs all his energies to procure the means for living; and life itself he puts off till just as he is about to die. The uses of wealth he imagines it will be soon enough to inquire into at some remote period; and when it arrives he is, in all probability, in that state where the rich and the poor meet on equal terms, and where moral distinctions alone are of any importance. "He heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them."

The christian of any reflection does not doubt that wealth, far from being of itself a good, may be, and often is so abused as to become a fearful evil. He is convinced that it is among the most powerful means for drawing the heart away from spiritual good, and rendering the character more sordid and sinful. As his neighbours become rich, he sees that almost invariably they forget God; and, if he be candid, he will admit that for himself he finds it increasingly difficult as his wealth accumulates, to keep his affections fixed upon their proper heavenly objects. He is inexcusable if his estimate is at variance with these facts. There cannot be any correct view of wealth except when it is considered in connexion with some advantage which it is capable of procuring. The end alone can give value to the means. This is the decision of unaided common sense, but religion requires something more, and its demands are met only so far as the proposed application of property is sanctioned by the Scriptures. The pursuit of riches is determined as justifiable or sinful, not only as the end is definitely set before us, but as that end is lawful. This distinction is not difficult to be apprehended. A man may resolve that when he becomes more opulent he will live more luxuriously, that he will allow himself every attainable indulgence, that he will have fine houses and costly equipages, that he will make a greater figure in the world, and court the admiration which vulgar minds so readily bestow upon this sort of display. Thus far he is free from the absurdity of contemplating wealth as intrinsically a good; but still his estimate of it is false, not because it will not procure him these gratifications, but because this is a diversion of it from its true purposes,

and sinful, because the ends which he proposes are altogether selfish and atheistical.

It is hardly to be supposed that there are any christians, properly so called, who pursue riches with this exclusive design. And yet, even in their estimate, it is to be feared that the application of wealth to personal indulgence is frequently the leading view. The gratifications which they propose may not be sinful in themselves, nor at all disproportionate to the degree of riches anticipated; but the error here, is the placing this selfish advantage at the head of the benefits of which they regard increased opulence as productive. Wealth, as the source of personal and family comfort, if so considered exclusively or even primarily, is undoubtedly the subject of an unchristian estimate.

Every gift which God dispenses to his people, whatever may be its secondary design, is intended in the first place to subserve his own glory. The reason of this is founded as well on the Divine benevolence, as on the infinite perfections of God in general; since his glory can never be prejudiced without injury to the best interests of his rational creatures. By the gift of riches there are two modes in which this great object may be promoted. The one is by winning our hearts more fully to the Author of all good; the other, by affording us the resources for beneficence to men. The christian, then, who estimates wealth as a means for the increase of personal devotedness to God, and for greater usefulness in the church and the world,—he and he only has a correct scriptural view of its proper design.

Of course there is no intention here to exclude its secondary uses for our own comfort and the ad-

vantage of our families. The question, it will be perceived, respects the order in which we place these considerations. There are a few illustrious christians on whose minds the prospect of personal indulgence appears to exert no force. But these are rare instances. The connexion of men in social life, often renders it impossible for them wholly to exclude from their consideration the lower uses of riches ; but there is no condition in which a christian can be placed where he is justified in reversing the order of these views, or in assigning other than the first place to God and his glory. This rule is one of universal and unvarying application. It is the peculiarity of christianity, that no one who really and fully participates its spirit "liveth to himself, and no such man dieth to himself. Whether we live, we live unto the Lord ; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord : whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's," Rom. xiv. 7, 8. Of everything truly christian, He is the alpha and the omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.—"For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things."

This subject assumes a yet more impressive character if we consider that wealth is a trust, and is committed to its possessors under a solemn and inviolable responsibility for its proper and religious employment. He who regards it as a gift to be used at discretion, takes an incorrect view of the subject. The doctrine of Scripture is, not only that it supplies the means for beneficence, but that he who has it is bound to this mode of dispensing it. The degree of responsibility of course will vary. But obligation increases in a ratio much greater than the actual increase of possessions. The man

whose income is ten times as great as that of his neighbours, does not prove faithful to his trust if his beneficence does not exceed in a far larger proportion; and that for the obvious reason, that his means for doing good have increased much more than his wealth. The poor man has, say fifty, the other, five hundred pounds per annum. Nearly the whole of the former sum must be employed in procuring the actual necessities of life; while of the latter, three-fourths, or at most four-fifths, will be amply sufficient for the agreeable maintenance of its possessor. It will not be questioned that in this case the means for serving mankind are at least twenty times as great as in the other. And if it is our duty to do good "as we have opportunity," according to the amount and proportion of our means, it is clear that the responsibility of the wealthy man far exceeds the mere difference between his income and that of the poor.

This mode of calculation may appear inadmissible, because it is so rarely employed. But truth is not dependent on popularity; and the obligations of Scripture, whether men will hear or whether they will forbear, remain eternally the same. How far the want of apprehension upon this subject results from the corrupt state of the human heart, may be gathered from the actual disproportion between the benefactions of the rich and those of the poor. It is a fact with which every one is familiar, that as men accumulate riches they usually lose the disposition to beneficence. Not only is wealth a trust in which individuals occasionally prove unfaithful, but it is accompanied by a naturally corrupting influence, so that as obligation increases, is the probability of unfaithfulness. It is a dangerous trust,

one in respect to which it is the utmost presumption for any one to say, "Though all prove treacherous, yet will not I."

Many professors of religion, in the early part of their career, had a lively impression of the unfaithfulness common among possessors of wealth. Their riches increased, whilst their eyes were fully open to the peril of a state of opulence ; but in spite of their confessions to this effect, and their apparently sincere regrets for the defalcations of others, they themselves gradually yielded to the captivations of the world, and eventually became of one spirit with those whom they had before condemned as unfaithful to God and to society. In such cases there was no surprise which could excuse their sin. They had been warned on every hand ; they had allowed the appropriateness of these cautions, and they had no doubt as to the danger of the condition into which they were entering. Their resolutions were apparently sincere and well considered ; and yet, such was the force of the influence to which the amassing of riches subjected them, that they, like thousands who had preceded them, were carried away "as with a flood," and, in their turn, became beacons to their successors, equally to be lamented, and probably, equally to be disregarded.

An individual, who with the accumulation of wealth has preserved his integrity, who is as beneficent in his measure as when that measure was much more scanty, who makes his abounding prosperity manifest to the world, not, as is commonly the case, by sumptuous entertainments and profuse expenditure in general, but by the enlargement of his charities,—upon such an one do even christians gaze with wonder, as upon a nature different from

their own, an object of eccentric orbit, that visits other suns and systems, a rare and surprising illustration of the power of religion. The singularity of such an occurrence unhappily justifies this astonishment; but what is this but the proof of the position now laid down, the evidence that the corrupting power of wealth is so great as to render escape from it absolutely impossible, except by the peculiar aid of Divine grace? It not only shows what ought to be our estimate of riches, but evinces also how very rarely our estimate is what it ought to be.

Nor is the incorrectness of the current opinion respecting wealth confined to its nature; it extends to its value, comparative and real. We have no disposition to decry the use of riches. This would be worse than absurd, because ungrateful; but while we allow their great utility, it is not to be forgotten that, in the scale of Divine gifts, they occupy a comparatively low place, or at least must allow the precedence to many others. Health, for example, as every rich valetudinarian will admit, is immeasurably preferable to opulence. Who, with a spark of correct feeling, would consent to exchange a real friend for the most princely fortune? "A good name is better than great riches." Intellectual powers are unquestionably of higher value than wealth, and moral endowments transcend the whole. The blessings of grace would be cheaply purchased at the cost of the material universe.

While, therefore, it would be ungrateful to deny the real use and convenience of riches, an excessive estimate is still greater ingratitude, because it involves the depreciation of higher and more valuable gifts. Yet although there are few christians who would not verbally assent to the scale here sug-

gested, it is to be apprehended that the practical estimate of wealth is in general widely different. He who labours to be rich at the expense of an anxiety and effort which affect his constitution, practically esteems opulence above health. He who engages in any business to the prejudice of his friend, places riches above friendship. He who does not watch against every mode of acquiring property which may affect his reputation, declares by his conduct that money is to be preferred to character. He who is so absorbed in the pursuit of riches as entirely to neglect the cultivation of his mind, gives them the precedence in the scale of Divine gifts. And lastly, he who injures his piety that he may improve his circumstances, commits the greatest error of the whole; for he practically estimates the sordid wealth of earth beyond those blessings which it cost the blood of Christ to procure. But where are the men who are guilty of this folly? Alas, alas! where are they not? Their multitude is so great as to render not inappropriate the words of an early christian apologist, who, when speaking to the heathen of the multitude of the believers of his days, says that they filled all places of resort. Would to God that we could join in the exception which he adds, "Your temples only we leave to to you." It might be enough, one would think, that our marts should be crowded with them without their intruding into our churches and presenting themselves at our altars. But if every one bearing the name of Christ, who yet, in some cases at least, estimates wealth beyond the blessings of his vocation, were to retire from our sacred places, the blank and desolation would be hardly less than that of which the writer just cited speaks, as the

result of the withdrawal of christians from general society. "Were so great a mass of men to retire to some remote region, you would have to search anew for people to govern, you would shudder at your silence and loneliness, and it would seem as if a world had perished."\*

The real as well as the comparative value of riches is the subject of erroneous estimation. The mind of man is so endowed, that though wealth may contribute to his outward comfort, it cannot afford him true satisfaction. Be his success great or small, the sources of real enjoyment remain unchanged. Especially is the fountain of the christian's happiness beyond the range of this world's vicissitude. He has wisely and providently placed himself out of the reach of the wind and the wave. To a certain extent, independence of sensible good is essential to his character. Does he calculate that he can swell the uncreated and inexhaustible fountain of true joy,

"With drops of creature-happiness?"

There is a mysterious fascination in riches which makes men forget how little and insignificant they are in determining the real amount of human enjoyment, and that worldly minds should be thus captivated is not surprising; but, that one who has laid up "treasure in heaven," should so far lose sight of the great principles of his spiritual conduct as to

\* *Vestra omnia implevimus, urbes, insulas, castella, municipia, conciliabula, castra ipsa, tribus, decurias, palatium, senatum, forum. Sola vobis relinquimus templa. Si tanta vis hominum in aliquem orbis remoti sinum abruptissemus a vobis, proculdubio expavissetis ad solitudinem vestram, ad silentium rerum, et stuporem quendam quasi mortui orbis. Quæsissetis quibus imperaretis.*—Tertullian. *Apologet.* § 37. pp. 33, 34. Ed. Rigalt. 1641.

imagine that the laying up "treasure upon earth" can materially increase his real happiness, may well excite our astonishment and regret.

Wealth is of the earth, and therefore earthly. It always sets in towards the creature, and the christian too often resembles the unskilful navigator, who makes no calculation on the currents of his course, till he finds himself drifting upon a lee shore. Though the grace of Christ is adequate to every exigence, yet he who estimates wealth without taking into the account its natural tendency, and the influence which it is likely to exert over him, is quite unprepared to stem its flow, and will be stayed in his progress, if he do not actually suffer shipwreck.

But if this be the result of increased opulence, then, far from ministering to his enjoyment, it will cause the loss of much substantial comfort. If it diminish his heavenly treasure, and withdraw his heart from God, he must of necessity be far less happy than in a state of comparative poverty. From wealth the utmost that he can hope for is the increase of outward accommodations; but what amends can these make for the absence or diminution of peace of mind, communion with God, and the lively hope of heaven? His capacities for enjoyment are not changed by an accession to his property. The only source of real satisfaction is immutable; but the access to that source, partially at least, is cut off, and what can be the result but disquietude and discontentment?

The fact stands thus:—Wealth may prove of spiritual advantage to its possessor, but the testimony of Scripture, and the experience of ages unite in assuring us that there is a greater probability of

the contrary effect. How the character of any individual will be affected by accessions to his property, no one can determine but Him who made and who knows the heart; and where they will prove of real advantage to his children he will undoubtedly bestow them; for "no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly," Psa. lxxxiv. 11. Riches, therefore, except so far as they come with the fullest sanction of his providence, cannot prove otherwise than injurious. In the larger number of instances, he sees good to deny them to his people; and to every christian in a condition of mediocrity this plainly indicates that his real interests would be endangered by any considerable accessions to his property. His conclusion, therefore, ought to be, "To me riches would be hurtful. In a more prosperous condition I should neither be so happy nor so useful. It is not unlikely that a large increase of fortune would prove my spiritual ruin, and that, in the day when the reasons of the Divine conduct shall be more fully disclosed, I shall have to bless my happy poverty as the only condition in which I could have secured the enjoyments of this better state." That this is the only correct mode of estimation is demonstrable: whether it is the prevalent mode is a question of much more dubious decision.

So general is the association of the idea of wealth with that of enjoyment, that, to the majority of men, the reputation of the one is a sufficient certificate of the possession of the other. When a person is announced as opulent, there is, in the absence of envy, an immediate sense of complacency, and his condition is at once felt to be desirable. It is true that in a spiritual mind a moment's thought may, and

does correct this impression ; but that it should have at all existed, proves how habitual is the association of riches with happiness. With no other blessing is it so regular or so immediate, except, indeed, where an individual is peculiarly suffering from its absence or loss. A sick man may feel that health is almost a guarantee of his neighbour's happiness, but by no one else are the two notions habitually and at once connected. To one smarting under the treachery or desertion of friends, from the assaults of calumny, the depression of his intellectual powers, or the conscious diminution of the consolations of religion, there may be a similarly lively association. In general, however, where the conclusion is arrived at, that blessings such as are in these cases peculiarly regretted, greatly conduce to the happiness of their possessors, it is by a somewhat circuitous process of thought ; whereas, in the other case, the impression is immediate and by a sort of instinct. This proves how currently wealth is regarded both as a good in itself, and as standing almost at the very highest point of the gifts of God.

Another indication of a like kind is the estimation in which wealthy men are held. We do not except to the courtesies by which the several ranks of society are properly distinguished, but to the respect of the heart ; that sort of complacency with which their characters, as well as their circumstances, or rather, in consequence of their circumstances, are regarded. Who does not covet the society of the rich man ? and that not because of his virtues, his intelligence, or his piety, but mainly on account of his wealth. This will make amends for his stupidity ; it will gloss over the deformity of his vices ; it will render endurable an arrogance and ostentation, any

approach to which in another would be quite past bearing. It is a rare thing for the character of such a one to be the subject of a just estimate ; for, while those who in any degree share the sunshine of his prosperity elevate him beyond his deserts, others, whose circumstances are in painful contrast, equally depreciate him. Their dislike, or, in cases of injury, their resentment, acquires a peculiar virulence from being associated with envy ; for envy is the tribute paid by a malignant spirit to superior happiness, real or supposed. But let even a poor man come within the magic circle which wealth describes around his prosperous neighbour, and it is amazing how his prejudices melt away. Whether the opulent man be unduly admired by those who are intimately associated with him, or unduly depreciated by those who are remote from him, the cause in both instances is the same, though developed in different ways. In each there is the same false estimate of wealth. The appeal which is made to the selfishness of either produces the variety in its result.

There are some men of strong powers, abundant resources, and great decision, who are resolved to be rich. Upon that subject their determination is formed ; and, providing no casualties occur, such as human prudence can neither foresee nor avert, there is little doubt of their success. God and his providence meanwhile are not in their thoughts. They make Him no party to their resolution, nor his will any qualification to its firmness. It is not necessary to say that, in a scriptural sense, the condition of such individuals is one of extreme peril. " They that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which

drown men in destruction and perdition," 1 Tim. vi. 9. And their success can hardly be other than a fearful indication of the Divine displeasure. On the other hand, the intervention of Providence in some unanticipated way, to thwart designs so palpably irreligious, is probably the highest mercy which can be bestowed upon them. If the christian estimates wealth correctly, that is, as a blessing only so far as its possession is accompanied by the Divine approval, he will look upon the prosperity of such persons with emotion almost amounting to horror; while, in that crossing of their devices, which to a man of the world looks unmixedly severe, he will hear the voice of paternal mercy, "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? how shall I deliver thee, Israel? how shall I make thee as Admah? how shall I set thee as Zeboim? Mine heart is turned within me, my repentings are kindled together," Hos. xi. 8. But in the prevalent false estimate of wealth, the condition respectively of the prosperous and the unsuccessful speculator is not thus regarded even by christians. We are, indeed, compelled to remark, that not unfrequently among those who ought to be better informed, there is a disposition to congratulate such persons upon their atheistical successes, or to condole with them upon their merciful calamities.

All earthly blessings have the mark of the curse. The best and purest enjoyments of life are connected with frailty, vanity, and disappointment. Our flowers wither before they are full blown, and our fruits fall while yet they are crude and immature. But, as labour, the first-born of the curse, has, by God's mercy, been changed into one of man's highest benefits, so, by the imperfection and mixed character of worldly good, the devout heart is turned

to those better and purer joys which belong to the happy and unchanging state beyond the grave. Wealth, as one of those blessings most likely to win the heart from God, is invariably associated with some memorials of its earthliness; some gracious counterpoise to the comforts which it is capable of procuring; something to impress the conviction of its inadequacy to the demands of an immortal spirit, and to direct the desires to more ennobling objects; and there can be no correct estimate of it which does not include these, its qualifying accompaniments. Those who view it in the distance see nothing but its glitter. To them it is a splendid and unsullied vision. But a more familiar acquaintance with its possessors shows us its disquietudes and the corroding anxieties which it plants in their hearts. While the poor are refreshed with the sweetness of sleep, they, on the contrary, are sighing away the hours of the night in fearfulness and care; and they often become prematurely old from the pressure of their envied load. Could the cabinet of their hearts be unlocked, and its contents fully presented to the world, such a revelation would give pause to the efforts of many an ardent pursuer of wealth, and he would stand aghast at his folly in aspiring to such a weight of splendid misery. The full extent and force of the drawbacks with which wealth is accompanied cannot be appreciated except by actual trial. But our opinions on the subject, in order to approach the truth, must embrace a considerable number of them, and these will be at once suggested by observation on the nature of things, and on the facts which are within our reach.

Upon the whole, the result of an investigation into the prevalent estimate of wealth will undoubt-

edly be, that, both in the church and in the world, it is for the most part false and antichristian. In order to establish this point in respect to any individual, it is not necessary to prove that he errs in every particular to which allusion has been made. He may mistake the nature of wealth; he may unduly appreciate it; or, he may miscalculate its probable influence upon his own character. And if he entertains incorrect opinions upon any one of these subjects, so far will he cherish an undue desire for its acquisition; in other words, so far will he be a covetous man. Since the state of our affections in so considerable a degree is dependant upon the decisions of our judgment, it is important that we should be properly enlightened on all those subjects which are likely to engage our desire and effort. The foregoing suggestions, with others of a like kind, which more profound observation upon the human heart will supply, are, therefore, worthy of serious meditation. And especially is it the duty of the christian to strive to obtain upon the subject before us, convictions of the truth deeply and graciously impressed upon his heart. While error of judgment inevitably leads to inordinate or misplaced affection, the correction of false opinions, if the heart be right with God, will originate a state of christian character answerable to the loftiness of our vocation, and to the amplitude of His designs, who calls us "out of darkness into his marvellous light."

## CHAPTER III.

## THE NATURE AND INDICATIONS OF COVETOUSNESS.

THE inordinate desire of any good may be considered in respect to the erroneous estimate in which it originates, or in comparison with certain rules, or other indications which determine its impropriety and excess. In the preceding pages, some suggestions have been offered upon the undue estimate of wealth, as it is but too commonly found in the church and in the world. It will now be our first business more particularly to remark the operation of this estimate, in the production of that unjustifiable affection which we distinguish by the term Covetousness.

Where any object is regarded as the end of our exertion, our desire will terminate in it; and that on which desire rests, as its ultimate object, calls forth, of necessity, a larger measure of complacent emotion and earnest effort than that which is regarded as a step to further attainments. Whenever a means is mistaken for an end, it will naturally be more strongly longed for than where the mind passes over it to something higher and better. It has been shown that, in this respect, wealth is often the subject of erroneous estimate, and that it is not uncommon for even christians to regard it as a

good in itself without definite reference to its uses. From the nature of the human mind, this error must issue in incorrect and inordinate affection.

The same result is to be anticipated from the absence of those views which commonly exert a corrective influence upon the heart. Where, for example, an object is contemplated as a means only, there is usually an accompanying sense of uncertainty, and the possibility of failure; and scarcely anything tends more fully to qualify and diminish the ardour of desire. If wealth is thus considered, it will often strike the mind that, supposing it realized, it may not supply the satisfaction which is currently anticipated as its result; or that it may be accompanied by detracting influences, so numerous and powerful, as to neutralize its benefits. And this suspicion is confirmed by a single glance at society. On every hand there is evidence that wealth has failed to afford the degree of enjoyment for which it was pursued. It procures no immunity from calamity, bereavement, distemper, or sorrow. The testimony of the rich in all ages evinces its inability to procure substantial happiness; and, above all, from the most wealthy, wise, magnificent, renowned, and luxurious prince of his times, we receive the mournful confession, that "all is vanity and vexation of spirit," Eccles. ii. 11. Under such impressions the heart is shy in its advances to an object so deceitful; and the man thus affected, though he finds it necessary, and esteems it binding, to procure, so far as may be, for himself and his dependants, the comforts of life, is yet free from that erroneous and inordinate passion by which many of his neighbours are distinguished. But where an object, be it wealth or anything else, is regarded as of itself

good, there is no room for this sort of suspicion. Affection assumes a peculiar form, because not qualified by any of the considerations which interfere in the other case.

He who conscientiously regards wealth as a means for promoting the glory of God, and the benefit of mankind, can hardly desire it too strongly. There is, in such a design, a sanctifying energy, which of itself will prove corrective to inordinate affection; and, so long as this alone is kept in view, it is not to be supposed that God will allow a devout spirit to become subject to error or excessive worldly attachment. To a christian who lives under this impression, it can hardly fail also to occur that, however riches may be made to subserve an object so worthy, yet they are by no means of the first importance to its attainment. Even in poverty he may realize a large measure of Divine conformity, and by his intercessions, his counsels, and his holy life, he may more fully serve his generation than he could by opulence. He recollects that the greatest benefactors of mankind could say, "Silver and gold have I none;" and that He who was first in beneficence as in sanctity, was one who "had not where to lay his head." His desires for wealth, therefore, will be less strong than his aspirations for personal holiness; he will "covet earnestly the best gifts," and in order to the attainment of these, he will be willing, if necessary, to submit to the poverty, and share the privations of his great Exemplar.

It is not affirmed that wealth may not be desired on other grounds, and those of a lower and less purely religious character. But where the order of motive is reversed; where the creature is first, and

the Creator last, the desire for its accession will be unwarrantably ardent. In this case, it is considered not as one means out of many, and of far less importance than others, but, if not as the only means, at all events, the most valuable, or of the most valuable means to the ends principally proposed. These ends in themselves are allowed to be lawful; but, by being put first in the order of motive, they cease to be so, since their predominance must interfere with that perfect devotion of the affections which is due to God. Were there no other evidence that this desire for wealth was inordinate, the habit of preferring the creature to the Creator would be sufficient. This, of itself, indicates such a predominance of sensuality, such low attainments in the christian life, such clouded and earthly views, such a contracted moral hemisphere, that we may fairly conclude, that he, of whom it may be averred, is too much the creature of sense to allow his affections to the blessings of earth to be otherwise than disproportionate and unjustifiable.

But perhaps the strongest corrective to inordinate desire for wealth, is a deep and religious sense of responsibility. He who regards it as partaking of the nature of a trust, and who considers that for every use of it he must give an account, that this account is not in any sense nominal, but sternly real; not in general, but in detail; not of masses of property, but of the minutest portions; that it is to be rendered to Him who searches the heart, and from whose inspection no error can possibly escape; that upon it, in some respect, the destinies of eternity are to depend,—will always desire and rejoice with trembling. To one who thus lives under the vivid impression of that solemn day of retribution,

combined with a correspondingly powerful sense of the shortness of time, and of the nearness of the invisible and eternal world, wealth will appear desirable, only as he can make it tell upon the awful and irrevocable decision, to which he is so rapidly hastening. A flaw in his accounts, as then tendered, he feels would be cheaply bought off by the riches of the universe; and, if his wealth increases, he is filled with deep and anxious concern, lest his responsibility should become too ponderous for grace so feeble and christianity so immature.

But where there is no such sense of responsibility, we look in vain for those gracious and salutary emotions of which it is the parent. As the only true and scriptural state of feeling is that which it generates, so in its absence the heart must be the subject of irregular and unchristian affections. The very constitution of our nature begets a peculiar fondness for that in which we have an absolute right, or over which we possess unlimited authority; and hence, if a christian regards wealth as a gift to be employed as he sees good, he can scarcely fail to delight in it inordinately. This opinion involves also an invasion of the Divine rights, and an irreligious and atheistic usurpation of the authority which belongs to God alone. When he who entertains it, speaks of the application of wealth to the purposes of beneficence, there is no recognition of the absolute and unchanging obligation under which he is placed. The proposals made to him to engage in any work of charity, he accepts or rejects, with a tone which plainly indicates that he considers it perfectly at his option to do, or to leave undone. The standard and mode of his benefactions is altogether arbitrary, and they are

conducted in a manner as irregular and capricious, as if there were no rule by which both their measure and application could be determined. When he observes an abounding munificence in those whose means are much more limited, he is altogether insensible to the rebuke which their conduct supplies. The affair, in his estimation, is wholly one of predilection and taste, in which every one must act as is most agreeable to himself, and he consequently does not apprehend that the ample charity of others can at all prove the inadequacy of his own. On the other hand, if he remarks that any of his wealthier neighbours fall short of his beneficence, he feels a self-complacency, as great as if he had performed some highly meritorious action. With his opinions, such an emotion is not altogether unreasonable; for, if the possessor of wealth be under no obligation, it is clear that every instance, and especially every eminent instance of munificence, is properly a work of supererogation. He, therefore, who has no sense of responsibility will inevitably withhold his hand from giving, in many cases, where he ought to extend it, and beyond the sin of inordinate affection, there will be the avaricious hoarding of wealth, or the undue application of it to purposes purely selfish.

But could we succeed in introducing into the mind of the christian, thus deluded, a vivid perception of the true state of the case, how sudden and amazing would be the change in his emotions! Could he see that every item of property is, on all hands, hedged in by responsibility, that there is nothing that he can do or leave undone which does not come within the account of his stewardship, and which will not be exhibited in the day of retribu-

tion ; that every refusal of beneficence, on the ground of mere option, will then appear against him, not only as the evidence of his want of the spirit of Christ, but of his assuming a treasonable authority over what had been committed to him, and so far usurping the Divine sovereignty : could he discern that every cost of vanity, or luxury, or ostentation, is a betrayal of his stewardship ; that there is a recording spirit on every hand, and that of the expenditure which is forgotten on earth, there is the most minute account in heaven ; that however he may be able to make up any defalcation here, faithlessness to his trust before God cannot be atoned for by any future accuracy, and that nothing less than the blood of Christ can wash out these damning lines : — were these impressions ever upon his mind, he would regard considerable accessions to his property as increasing his responsibility to a degree truly terrible ; and far from cherishing the strong desire by which he is at present actuated, he would contract his circle of business, and earnestly desire that his acquisitions might never exceed an humble and competent mediocrity.

If in the present state of his feelings he should be the subject of occasional misgivings, and for a moment suspect that neither his perceptions nor his affections are as they should be, he commonly turns to the sentiments and habits which prevail among his neighbours, and especially among his fellow christians, and in them he imagines that he finds a sanction for his own worldliness of affection, and remissness in beneficence. If they be right, he is not far wrong ; and he cannot allow himself to suppose that such a multitude are in error and defect, and that none possess views properly scriptural and

feelings truly christian, except the few whose sentiments and affections differ so remarkably from those of the majority of men. He not unfrequently goes farther, and, in his own mind, condemns these individuals as ascetic or fanatical, and attributes their conduct to a fondness for singularity or display. Or should he have sufficient virtue to avoid conclusions so unjust, he takes refuge in the not uncommon notion, that there are two sorts of christians, whose duties differ as much as do their real characters, and he consoles himself with the idea that he is not called into the aristocracy of the kingdom of God; that the particular measure of the christian character, which it is the Divine will he should attain, is far below the elevated piety of some others whom he has the opportunity of observing. He dreams that his errors and deficiencies belong rather to the ordination of Providence, than to the depravity of his own heart, and thus he succeeds in quieting the remonstrances of his own conscience, and settles down into a state of perilous and carnal self-complacency.

The apprehension of the truth, such as we have just remarked, would in this respect also produce a strange revulsion in his feelings. In that burst of divine light, every refuge of lies would instantly disappear. Conscience would dash down the drugged chalice by which her silence had before been procured, and would assume the lofty bearing and the firm tone which befit the dignity of her office. The man would wonder at the facility with which he had been misled, and his own character and the whole range of objects around him would assume a different aspect. The prevalence of sensuality and covetousness, both in the church and in the world,

he would no longer regard as any palliation for his own sin. On the contrary, he would apprehend it as one of the strongest proofs of the dangerous influence of worldly good. He would discern, that though there are degrees of christianity, there are not distinct and opposite varieties of it; that the inheritors of the Spirit of Christ, in any considerable degree, are indeed few, and that the distinction between them and the mass of professors, so far as wealth is concerned, is not in the measure of each, but in their very principles. He would, for the first time, apprehend the force of our Lord's exclamation, "How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God," Mark x. 2, 3. The spell would be dissolved which held his affections in bondage to wealth. By the force of a salutary apprehension of the imminent danger of worldly prosperity, he would cease to be a covetous man; and, in a spirit of diligence and spirituality suitable to his high vocation, he would "work out his own salvation with fear and trembling."

The desire of wealth may be inordinate, as well comparatively as absolutely; hence the absence of a correct opinion on its rank among the gifts of God is a common source of covetousness. He only who assigns to it its true place in the scale of the Divine blessings, will desire it in its true proportion. Even in respect to the blessings of this life, the heart of man cannot be reduced to a *tabula rasa*; and the religion of the New Testament, whatever may be the pretensions of fanaticism, was never designed to produce this effect. One great security against an inordinate affection for riches, therefore, is that each of the enjoyments supplied by the providence of God should be desired only in the

degree which it merits, and that wealth should assume a correct relation to them. If this state of feeling be realized, there will not be any danger of exalting the one to the prejudice of the others. Indeed the effort properly to arrange and systematize our preferences will of itself have a salutary effect. It involves an inquiry into the comparative value of the gifts of God, which is by no means common. Truth possesses an energy, which, to a mind properly disposed, renders it all but irresistible; and even the covetous man, in attempting this process, may possibly be surprised to find how little can be alleged in favour of a state of opulence, and how much to recommend other blessings which hitherto, in the comparison, he has but little esteemed.

Above all, our security consists in giving to the blessings of grace their proper rank in our estimation and desire. If the christian consistently maintain the choice which he has made of these, as the proper and only sources of real satisfaction, he will be happily delivered from all undue concern about other things. But if he consider worldly good as a suitable and real subsidiary to the enjoyments which they alone can supply, it is certain that he will desire it in a degree which is warranted neither by reason nor by the word of God. In order to the prevention of any such irregularity of affection, it is requisite that he should maintain a lively sense of the completeness of God's provision at once for his salvation and for his happiness. When, however, we consider the inadequacy of the prevalent estimate of the amplitude of the gospel, and how few steadily regard the "kingdom of God as peace and joy," as well as "righteousness," we need not wonder at the efforts made by professors

of religion to eke out their scanty measure of spiritual enjoyment, by the possessions of this life.

It has been already suggested, that wealth is to be estimated as a blessing only so far as it is acquired and retained under the Divine sanction. His affection, who desires or delights in it without self-distrust, is necessarily inordinate. Let a man believe that no amount of riches will or can prove other than a real advantage to him, and covetousness will be the natural and unavoidable result. Blindness to the depravity and deceitfulness of their own hearts is among christians a fruitful source of this sin, and perhaps there is no delusion more common, or, in many sincere minds, fraught with consequences more deeply to be deplored. A christian, for example, perceives that his opulent neighbour disposes of his property in vanity and vice, and he experiences a laudable indignation at this prostitution of the gifts of God. He supposes that, were he in a similar situation, instead of thus wasting or misapplying his wealth, he would cause it to be the source of a beneficence the most efficient and extensive; and so indeed he would, could he carry with him into such a condition the emotions by which he is now animated. But these are the growth of his present state. To this soil they are indigenous; to the other they are exotic, and can only flourish there by a happy but unusual conjuncture of climate and culture. Let the situation of the two parties be exchanged, and who will say that the benevolent spirit would not become selfish and sensual in its opulence, and the worldly and irreligious considerate and devotional in his mediocrity?

He, therefore, who makes no calculation of the corrupting power of wealth, and the springing forth

of the human heart to its agency, or, if he refer to them at all, supposes himself sufficiently strong to overcome them, will be, in the mere desperation of his presumption, a covetous man. So long as he remains in a condition of mediocrity, he will probably soothe and cajole his conscience by ample promises of the good which he will effect when his condition is more favourable to an extended system of beneficence: and if, at length, God in his judgment should decree the gratification of his desires, his covetousness will assume its more perfect form of avarice, and, with an increased and now insatiate appetite for riches, he will heap to himself "treasure against the last days."

It is demonstrable, that he who inordinately longs for riches will as unduly prize them when possessed. Excessive desire for wealth, and idolatrous delight in it, are but two different modes of the same sin. The one belongs peculiarly to a condition of comparative poverty, the other to a state of opulence. We sometimes wonder when we see men, who have made haste to be rich, restricting their beneficence as their means increase; but nothing is more natural, and, in fact, except where the grace of God interferes to prevent, it is a result always to be anticipated. The impetuosity with which they grasped at wealth is the covetousness which properly characterized that degree of their property; the tenacity with which they retain it is the same covetousness in its more mature form. Nothing, therefore, can be more absurd than the professions of benevolence with which such men excuse their ardour in the pursuit of riches, for it is as certain as that night follows evening, that in proportion as they prosper they will become avaricious.

These and the like considerations may serve to illustrate the truth to which they have been applied, a truth indeed all but self-evident,—that where there is an undue estimate of wealth, there the affection for it will be inordinate. So invariable is this rule, that however apparently correct the state of his affections, if his opinions respecting riches are unsound, the christian may conclude that more or less his heart is affected by them. Error on this subject cannot prove innocuous; and though, in some instances, there is difficulty in tracing its practical operation, yet it may safely be assumed as an infallible indication of some latent yet not less real obliquity or irregularity of desire. There are, however, other indications of inordinate affection for wealth, which may possibly prove more obvious and available. We allude to its results, especially as they affect the Divine claims and law. These may be examined and attested by a few general rules, the truth of which will be readily apparent.

First in order, and first in importance, it is assumed that *whatever interferes with SUPREME DELIGHT IN GOD must be anti-christian.* Were there no express law upon the subject, this could hardly be questioned by a reflective mind. For if our delight in any object is to be determined by its intrinsic worthiness, or by the amount of benefit which results from it, it is indubitable that in the hearts which he has created our Maker can have no rightful competitor. Whatever recommends a human being to our regard dwells in him in infinite perfection. The service which one creature can effect for another is but a faint shadow of his actual and unbounded beneficence. But beyond the conclusions thus suggested, irresistible as they are, there is a law

for all his intelligent creatures, which to us, at least, has been most perspicuously revealed. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. This is the first and great commandment," Matt. xxii. 37, 38. Mark xii. 29, 30. And hence to be the disciples of Christ, it is essential that he should be habitually preferred to the dearest human friends, and even to life itself, Luke xiv. 26, a demand, the reasonableness of which is sufficiently obvious.

In its mode and operations, this disposition admits of considerable variety. For instance, it renders holy meditation particularly welcome to the spirit. He who realizes it in any adequate degree, will, with unspeakable satisfaction, retire from the avocations of the world to fix his thoughts steadily and with reverent emotion upon the Fountain of all good. Greatly does he rejoice in the representations which the Scriptures supply of the Divine magnificence, glory, and holiness; and so far will he strive to abstract himself from what is sensual, as to gain, in holy contemplation, some such glimpses of the character of God as cannot be realized by the eye unpurged from earthly humour. He knows something of the temper of Moses, who, with the interests of a great nation upon his thoughts and affections, burned, notwithstanding, with that heavenly passion which led him to pray, "I beseech thee show me thy glory." It is not curiosity which prompts this desire; for the ground on which he stands is too holy to allow of that. It is not pride, for never is he so deeply abased as when nearest to the uncreated light. No; it is love, pure, grateful, divine, engrossing love: "One thing have I

desired of the Lord, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to inquire in his temple," Psa. xxvii. 4.

With this disposition nothing interferes more frequently than covetousness; and that degree of worldly attachment and concern which indisposes the christian to divine contemplation, call it by what name you will, is covetousness. It is not asserted but that, in some cases, the spirit is willing while the flesh is weak; that infirmities of body and mind often prevent the sincere christian from that continued and steady meditation on God, which he most earnestly desires. The influence of these infirmities is probably more apparent when he attempts to fix his thoughts on spiritual subjects, than on ordinary occasions; since, in the one case, he is probably the subject of temptation, from which in others he will be free; and in consequence of the advantage which Satan takes of his afflicted condition, his mind becomes either prostrated or distracted, and he retires from the effort in distress and shame. Such persons require our most tender sympathy, and it would be cruel to aggravate their sorrow by a want of discrimination in our censures.

But while we admit thus much, lest we should "defy whom the Lord hath not defied," we would add that he who is capable of meditating steadily upon the blessings of this life, in order either to devise plans for securing such as he does not possess, or to feed his fancy with the hopes which his condition suggests, who finds no weariness or prostration of mind in such exercises, though daily renewed and prolonged for hours successively, cannot rationally complain of any physical or

mental incapacity for divine meditation. The hinderance here, if a hinderance there be, must be moral; it is the predominance of another passion; there is an undue exercise of the affections in respect to worldly good, and a consequent want of delight in God. Such a state of feeling, therefore, is at once determined to be anti-christian.

It may however be alleged that such subjects are too abstract to supply anything like an infallible rule; that many are so little accustomed to intellectual effort, that they cannot be expected, under any circumstances, to enjoy exercises purely mental. Be it so: we will not pause to inquire into the force and fallacy of this reasoning, because there are other indications to which, it will be allowed, this objection does not apply.

To resume therefore—Delight in God is indicated in the emotions with which we contemplate his works, and these, not considered merely as objects of beauty, but as evincing his wisdom and goodness. "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God." They trace his hand, they admire his workmanship, and find the unequivocal and cheering assurances of his beneficence and tenderness in those proofs of skill with which the creation abounds. To a mind thus influenced, in a sense far other than that of the dreams of pantheism, the benign Creator

" Warms in the sun, refreshes in the breeze,  
Glows in the stars, and blossoms in the trees,  
Lives through all life, extends through all extent,  
Spreads undivided, flourishes unspent."

Where there exists an ardent friendship for an absent individual, there will be the disposition to call

to its aid every association which present and even inanimate objects can supply. The tree under which he rested, the walk to which he was accustomed to resort, the hour of his visit, the room in which he sat, his very chair, all become in a sense sacred, and the mind of his friend regards each with emotions of unspeakable fondness and delight. Thus is it with the man devoted to God. He finds the impulses of his gratitude and love in the most minute portions of the visible creation, and the gleam of an insect's wing imparts joy to his heart. That which to another possesses no charm, becomes to him the medium of communication with the invisible world, and the birds of heaven, and the lilies of the field, renew in his mind the delightful consciousness of the all-pervading presence, and the unwearied agency of Him on whom his affections are supremely fixed.

Nor less does he thread out the Divine power and operation through the dim and mysterious avenues of providential government. He turns away with dissatisfaction from intermediate agencies, from mere proximate causes, from everything where God is not. And when the dispensations of Heaven are involved in obscurity, he watches, with solemn and patient love, the cloud that is around the throne, preferring the sense of his unsearchable presence to all reference to instruments of the Divine will which are easy of observation. Is his reputation assailed by the tongue of the wicked? He holds fast the great principle of his faith, "JEHOVAH hath said, Curse David," 2 Sam. xvi. 10. In his judgment upon providence, it imports little whether it be the fire from heaven, or the Chaldean bands, which deprive him of his property. He falls

back from their agency, saying, "JEHOVAH hath taken away," Job i. 16, 17, 21.

In the revelation of the Divine purposes to a lost world, it is the delight of such an one to contemplate, not the mere provision for his own salvation, but the developement of the character of God which these so eminently supply. His spirit is stirred and elated at the thought of the immense glory which they reflect upon their Author; and, when he looks forward to the consummation of these plans in the full recovery of apostate man to the kingdom of Christ, it is not only the removal of a mass of misery, and the universal abounding of happiness, which kindle his zeal and his song, but specially the vindication of the Divine benignity and the eternal honour of the conquering Son of God, thus certainly and irrevocably secured.

It will hardly be affirmed that all these subjects are out of the sphere of ordinary christians, and therefore altogether unsuitable to their contemplation and delight. It is an indication of an unsatisfactory and sensual state of character, when in general the thoughts rest upon secondary and instrumental causes, and never or rarely rise through the works of nature, the appointments of Providence, or the ordinances of grace, to God himself: more particularly, when wealth is acquired without a distinct recognition of the Divine benignity in its communication; or when it is lost, and the only reference is to the unhappy accident or mischance in which proximately the privation originated. If, in the one case, there is such a degree of elation, or in the other, such absorbing grief and disappointment, as to prevent an individual from a direct acknowledgment of God as the source of the good,

and the appointer of the evil, it is plain that what he has gained, or that of which he has been bereaved, is regarded with inordinate affection and dependence, that he walks by sight rather than by faith, and, in short, that, to a certain extent, his spirit is depraved by the sin of covetousness.

Another, and a similar mode, in which this sin interferes with delight in God, is by rendering distasteful the exercise of prayer, and indisposing man to communion with his Maker and Redeemer. This indication, it will be allowed, is generally sufficiently unequivocal. Nothing can be more clear than that he who ardently delights in God will seek every opportunity of direct fellowship with him. To decline intercourse with any individual is the surest evidence of our being wanting in complacent regard. And if the professor of religion attends to the duties of the closet, merely because they are duties; if he drags thither a cold and reluctant heart; if, when there, his mind is constantly occupied or called off to other objects, while in his worldly business he exhibits all possible alacrity, and can succeed readily, habitually, and with lively interest, in fixing his attention upon the means for acquiring or retaining wealth, it needs no peculiar penetration to discern the sin in question. To himself, and to all who are acquainted with the character of his spiritual exercises, it must be obvious that he allows his interest in worldly things to militate against delight in God, and, of consequence, that his affection towards them is excessive and criminal.

Every one is capable of appreciating the indication of character which is supplied by the choice of associates. This is a mode of declaring moral preferences which no one can mistake. The subject

of a sincere and ardent friendship, while he delights in any object with which his friend is associated, refers with peculiar complacency to one, who, in person or character, strikingly resembles him; especially, if he bear his name, and share his blood,—if, for example, he be his son. And thus is it with the consistent christian. His love to the children of God is only second to his delight in God himself: “Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him,” 1 John v. 1. Saints of every age have been distinguished by delight in each other, and God has been pleased to honour their intimate association with the express declaration of his approval, Mal. iii. 16—18. Those who most fully bear the image of their heavenly Father, to him who delights in God will always be the most acceptable, the only truly acceptable companions. It will afford him constant enjoyment and profit, to mark the various evidences of their heavenly birth, and the developements in them of the Divine character; on their example he will strive to model his own; in their converse he will receive the impressions of the beauty of holiness, and such intercourse upon earth will to his spirit be the earnest of the joys of heaven.

But when a christian professor is shy of his fellows in the church, when in general he eschews their society, and especially that of the most eminent and exemplary christians; when, if by necessity cast into it, he studiously avoids those topics which peculiarly become the intercourse of saints, and seeks to divert the conversation to the things of the world, it is evident that, in such a mind, there is a want of sympathy with the children of God as such, and, we are warranted in concluding, a want

of delight in Him whose image they bear. If we find an individual of this character courting the associations of the world, delighting in intercourse with men of the world, entering with a manifest relish into conversation on markets, and prices, and speculations, and topics of that order, it is easy to assign the cause to his want of complacent regard for his associates in christian profession. A man of business, of course, must mix with men of business ; but, as every one knows, there is a great difference between intercourse which is necessary, and that which is matter of choice ; and to urge the necessity of the one case, as an apology for voluntary association in the other, is a mere trick to delude our own consciences, or to impose upon others, and one, it may be added, the fallacy of which every one detects, except its unfortunate inventor.

With this want of affection for the people of God there is often associated a spirit of censoriousness, and a severity of judgment, upon their defects and failures. Their virtues and excellences are a tacit reproach to him who does not love their society ; these therefore he casts into the shade, and whatever can tend to render their society unattractive, he brings out into prominence. Upon the inconsistencies of ministers and of eminent christians he dwells with a peculiar and malignant satisfaction ; and it is well, if to this he do not add the still more heinous sin of aspersion and calumny. On the other hand, of the character of his worldly associates he is very tender. The deep depravity of the hearts of the unregenerate, their total alienation from God, their settled enmity to the gospel of Christ, are subjects which he cautiously avoids ; while their integrity, their liberality, their good

name, are as ostentatiously blazoned. That "they are the enemies of the cross" upon which he professes to rely for salvation, that their "god is their belly," that "they glory in their shame," that "they mind earthly things," are matters of slight consideration and regard: but that their morals are not seriously exceptionable, that they enjoy a passable reputation, that as neighbours, they are friendly, and in their domestic relations, affectionate, and that occasionally at least, they are even beneficent—these are recommendations, which, when duly expanded and magnified by the power of his imagination, materially assist in quieting his conscience. The church which God "purchased with his own blood," is so impure that his immaculate spirit finds no delight in it; but the world, the apostate, God-defying world, the world that "lieth in wickedness," affords him specimens of native virtue, so lovely as altogether to fascinate and enchain his affections. And yet the one is to be presented "faultless before the presence of the Divine glory with exceeding joy;" and the other to be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and the glory of his power." Does he make his choice for eternity as well as for time? or does he imagine it possible that the results of his preference are to cease on this side the grave?

The word of God is another of those objects in which, on account of their love to its Author, the saints of every age have delighted. If there ever was a period in which a want of interest in Divine revelation might possibly have been palliated, it was undoubtedly when that revelation was confined to the books of Moses, and of his immediate successors in the sacred canon; before the mystic, yet clearer

light of evangelic prophecy, had fully arisen upon the Church. Yet in the experimental writings of the Old Testament, nothing is more striking than the extraordinary value which their authors attached to the imperfect discoveries of the Divine will with which they were blessed; and their ardent affection for the law of God may well put to shame the less fervid emotions of multitudes who live in the perfect day of the world which was to come. The hundred and nineteenth psalm, for example, is an uninterrupted eulogy upon the dim and shadowy disclosures of the Jewish dispensation; and its author appears as if carried out by his interest in it beyond the power of human expression. The same disposition continues, more or less, to distinguish those who are truly devoted to God. The Divine word is still to them, and with more eminent reason, "their song in the house of their pilgrimage—their meditation day and night—sweeter than honey or the honey-comb—better than thousands of gold and silver." Whether privately read and studied in the closet, or heard from the pulpit, there is always, to their healthy appetite, new freshness and nourishment in its disclosures; while, ever and anon, single passages rise like stars in the midst of darkness to show their path.

There are those who hear and receive, and that gladly, the word of God; but "the cares of the world, and the deceitfulness of riches, and the desires of other things" interfere with its growth in their souls, and they do not bring forth fruit to perfection. This failure is commonly indicated by the loss of their relish for the Divine word. It is probable that, in general, such persons neither abandon the perusal of the book of God, nor wholly

neglect the public ministry. But the relish and delight are passed away. It fails to connect them, as formerly, with its blessed Author, and with the contemplation of that good of which he is the exclusive source. At home, there is a weariness in its perusal, and, in the house of God, a captiousness on the one hand, or a dull insensibility on the other. The eye wanders unmeaningly over the page, and the ear receives the sound without impression of its significancy, while, in either case, the mind is incessantly diverted from its all-important topics. No one need be told how common among professors of religion is such alienation from the word of God ; and it is hardly more necessary to adduce proof that in, at least, the majority of cases, this unhappy state of mind may be traced to that inordinate affection for the possessions of this life, to which it is attributed by our Lord himself, Matt. xiii. 22.

Where a ministry is highly acceptable, where there is apparently a strong appetite for the word of life, and where multitudes sit in charmed silence to welcome the forcible and scriptural eloquence of sanctified intellect, it sometimes moves our wonder that the practical results should be so inconsiderable and discouraging. But thus has it been in all ages ; and the declaration of God to an ancient prophet may be applied with equal force to a large proportion of the congregations of modern times. "The children of thy people still are talking against thee by the walls, and in the doors of the houses, and speak one to another, every one to his brother, saying, Come, I pray you, and hear what is the word that cometh forth from the Lord. And they come unto thee as the people cometh, and they sit before thee as my people, and they hear thy words, but they will not

do them : for with their mouth they show much love, but their heart goeth after their covetousness. And, lo, thou art unto them as a very lovely song of one that hath a pleasant voice, and can play well on an instrument : for they hear thy words, but they do them not," Ezek. xxxiii. 30—32. To the faithful minister of Christ who is depressed under a sense of the unfruitfulness of his labours, it may afford some relief to reflect that he is not singular in his grief. The sin which presents so serious an obstacle to his success is one of which all the servants of God have had, more or less, to complain. "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his Lord ;" and it was this self-same covetousness which subjected to derision the ministry of Christ himself. "The Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things ; and they derided him," Luke xvi. 14.

Illustrations on this subject might be greatly multiplied, but these will suffice to exhibit and confirm the great principle with which we set out—That whatever desire for wealth interferes with delight in God is inordinate and culpable. It is the prevailing sin of the unregenerate world,—covetousness.

We proceed, therefore, to a second and cognate rule, namely, *That whatever desire for riches interferes with our desire for the image of God is unlawful and antichristian.* It is impossible that we can highly venerate and ardently love any individual without strongly wishing to resemble him. The perception and approval of excellence necessarily involves the desire for its attainment. Since it is in the apprehension of the Divine character, and in the impression of its glory and beauty, that our delight originates, this holy complacency can never be

dissociated from the aspiration for the likeness of God.

Thus all the indications of Divine delight to which we have adverted, far from being barren of profit, possess a distinct and specific design. By this, the genuine is distinguished from the spurious. Meditation upon the character, or the works, or the grace of God, may be entered into by a mind constitutionally reflective, by an irreligious natural theologian, or by the mere professional divine; and each, thus following the bent of his predisposition or mental habits, may find in the exercise a considerable degree of gratification. But here the matter ends. Beyond the bare intellectual luxury, there is nothing to distinguish such meditation from the inane stupidity of the veriest worldling. But the divine contemplations of the christian, resulting from moral preference, are conducted with the recognized design of obtaining increased conformity to the image of God; or even if this object be not matter of distinct reference, it is impossible that communion with God, when intimate and uninterrupted, should issue in any other way. He who is in constant association with an individual whom he highly esteems will inevitably and almost insensibly partake of his character and even his manners. Thus, in the nature of things, must it be with the devoted believer. "We all, with open face, beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image, from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord," 2 Cor. iii. 18.

These truths will supply us with a convenient mode of testing the nature and degree of our desires for worldly possessions. It will be perceived that

the first thing necessary to the divine desires now under consideration is a due apprehension of the character of God. That degree of affection for wealth which leaves this unimpaired, or rather, which does not prevent its natural increase in clearness and impression, may safely be pronounced lawful. But where desire dims and enfeebles the power of heavenly perception, where it renders the Divine character less clear and intelligible, or where it prevents us from realizing increasingly lucid apprehensions of spiritual subjects in general, we may reasonably infer that it is sensual and excessive. As the eye of the body can only gaze upon one object at once, so the mental vision, if steadily fixed upon the things of earth, can only take in, by a sort of occasional side glance, the character and glory of God. Such a subordinate reference will prove of little use. If we would see God, we must fix our eyes intently upon the place of his presence, till the cloud of sense disappears, and he comes forth from the depth of eternity with light on his brow, and mercy in his hand.

The desire under consideration may be considered as referring either to personal holiness or to a resemblance to God in his beneficence. It is clear that in the absence of a high degree of complacency towards the Divine purity, the former cannot exist. We never long to resemble any being in a feature of his character which we do not greatly esteem. He only who regards the sanctity of God with deep and reverent delight will aspire to his personal image. That degree of affection for wealth, therefore, which withdraws our contemplations from God, and consequently impairs our perceptions of his glory, or which so far pre-occupies our hearts as to

prevent our complacent admiration of his holiness, must be equally prejudicial to our religious desires, and is thus determined to be inordinate and sinful.

But christianity is designed, not only to restore us personally to the image of God, but also to assimilate us to him in our relations to the church and the world. Hence it is currently described in Scripture as a diffusive good, and its possessors are said to be the "light of the world—the salt of the earth—a city set on a hill [which] cannot be hid," Matt. v. 13—15. To beneficence the obligation is as strong as to personal purity, and it is as contrary to the genius of the religion we profess to do no good to man as to offer no prayer to God. He, therefore, who has a lively perception of the glory of Divine love will earnestly desire to be "merciful as his heavenly Father is merciful." It is here that the effect of inordinate attachment to riches is peculiarly manifest. There is no feature of the character of God, except so far as the Divine beneficence is the fountain of good to him, which the covetous man regards with so little complacency. Of the intrinsic fairness of mercy, of the glory and attractiveness of benevolence in itself, of the universal pity and tenderness in the heart of God, his perception is faint and feeble; to resemble him from whom descends every good gift and every perfect gift, presents no attractions to his sordid spirit. Far from desiring, in this respect, a Divine conformity, his whole soul revolts from a model, the imitation of which, in any considerable degree, would prove so costly.

A third rule on this subject, and one closely connected with the two foregoing, is—*That whatever desire for worldly possessions interferes with confidence in God, is inordinate and sensual.* The false

estimate of wealth is productive not only of excessive affection, but also of dependence, considered either as a good in itself, or as the source of a satisfaction which actually it is unable to supply. Trust in God, and trust in riches are scriptural antitheses, 1 Tim. vi. 17. They are the opposite principles of the soul. The one is the great evangelic principle of religious action and Divine consolation, and originates in delight in God; the other is a mode of covetousness. The indications are various, to some of which it may not be unprofitable to direct our attention.

He who habitually regards wealth as a good, and therefore confides in it for substantial enjoyment, will be dissatisfied if it be denied him, or if it be withdrawn from him. With his lips he may allow that God is both wise and beneficent, but his heart will rebel against his professions; for no man can stedfastly believe that a gracious Being would deny a real good which he was able to bestow, or take away one which it was in his power to continue. It will follow that this estimation of, and trust in riches cannot consist with that lively sense of the Divine wisdom and mercy on which is based a scriptural confidence in God. The highest view which we can conceive such a mind to attain is, that the refusal or deprivation of wealth is a judicial act on the part of the Divine Governor, a punishment for past unfaithfulness. And this, though sometimes it may in a sense be true, and may not be without its salutary influence upon the heart, falls far short of the inimitably tender and affecting representations of Scripture on the subject. According to its statements, what God does to his people he does as a Father. The hand that smites them is the hand of

love. His disciplinary chastisements are the evidences of sonship, the distinction and test of legitimacy in those whom he most tenderly regards, Heb. xii. 5—8. But these are views to be appreciated only in a higher school of faith. Wealth, by him who trusts in it as unmixed good, or as a good of itself, can never be lost without unchristian regret, nor received without unchristian elation.

Closely allied to discontent is anxiety. They are, in fact, but different modes of distrust of God; the one referring to our present, the other to our future condition. Both may be regarded as indicative of our trust in wealth, for each is a painful emotion resulting from its absence, actual or anticipated. Our sense of the want of riches leads to the one, our apprehension of it produces the other. They are also readily convertible. Anxiety, limited to the present, becomes discontent; and discontent extended to the future, changes to anxiety. Thus, as the sensual mind varies the time and object of its reference, it presents these two phases of the same sin, and that sin unbelief.

The correctness of this representation is capable of very plain proof. The promises of God are designed to remove all solicitude respecting the blessings of this life. They are so numerous and so varied in their form, as to be abundantly applicable to every conceivable condition in which we can be placed, while each is as unchanging as the nature of its gracious Author. But in a great number of cases they fail of their desired effect; and there are multitudes of christians who, in spite of every effort which God has made to relieve them from its influence, are perpetually the victims of worldly anxiety. And yet these persons will readily allow

that had they a certain amount of wealth, they should at once be at ease. If, for example, by a grant of the imperial parliament of these realms, every anxious christian was assured for himself and each of his children of a considerable annual pension, his cares would be at an end. This, it is obvious, therefore, would do what the promises of God have altogether failed to effect. But such a difference can be accounted for upon no other principle than the weakness of his faith in God, and the strength of his confidence in riches.

Of the fruits of the Spirit, peace is one, which, in the representations of Scripture, and in the experience of the people of God, occupies a prominent position. The terms in which it is described, not only teach us its value, but indicate also the degree in which it may be enjoyed. Thus, it is called, "the peace of God, which passeth all understanding," Phil. iv. 7; and our Saviour represents it as one of those secret and inscrutable gifts of which he alone is the source. "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid," John xiv. 27. The satisfaction which results from a conscious reconciliation with God is a blessing of unspeakable value; but, beyond this, it is our privilege to hold the spirit in the perfect and unchanging calmness of resignation, and to possess the subjugating and quieting influence of Divine grace upon all the affections and emotions of the heart. This it is which distinguishes the true believer from the ungodly world. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked,"

Isa. lvii. 20, 21. But, on the other hand, "the work of righteousness shall be peace;" and the further it is allowed its due operation, the more perfectly is this characteristic developed, for "the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance for ever," Isa. xxxii. 17. But christian serenity results from confidence in God. "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee: because he trusteth in thee," Isa. xxvi. 3. The order of this beautiful and divine process therefore is trust in God; fixedness of mind on him; peace, perfect, secure, divinely protected peace. "He that believeth shall not make haste," Isa. xxviii. 16. He shall know no turbulent care, no corroding anxiety, none of that flutter and disturbance to which the unbelieving mind is subject. His spirit is at repose; his "heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord."

But if this holy serenity is a natural fruit of divine confidence, and if it is a part of the christian's birthright, its absence must indicate the want or the weakness of trust in God, and a consequent low state of christian experience. Where, therefore, as in the case of every anxious christian, our affection for the things of this life involves a degree of mental disquietude, it is certainly inordinate and unjustifiable. Anxiety is never entertained respecting an object which we do not value. Undue anxiety evinces excess of affection, and that anxiety which prevents the christian from the enjoyment of evangelic peace, cannot be otherwise than undue. It follows, that he who is the subject of this degree of anxiety regards the possessions of the present world with excessive and idolatrous affection. These views appear to be distinctly recognised in the New

Testament; hence when the apostle would supply the Hebrew christians with the most efficient antidote to covetousness, it is anxiety and discontent to which his remedies are directly applied; and these he seeks to assuage by a reference to the fidelity and tenderness of God: "Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me," Heb. xiii. 5, 6.

A fourth general rule for ascertaining the degree of our desire for, and delight in wealth, is derived from the provisions of the second table of the decalogue; or, to speak more accurately, from that summary of its contents found in the second great commandment. As the first commandment requires our delight and confidence to rest supremely in God, so does the second demand our most expansive benevolence towards men. *Whatever degree of affection for riches, therefore, interferes with this benevolence, either in itself or in its operation, may be safely condemned as excessive and unlawful.* The indications of this state of feeling are for the most part practical, and will be the subject of remark in the following chapter. But there are one or two illustrations to which, without anticipating what belongs to the future part of this inquiry, we may allude in this place.

That desire for riches which will not suffer us to contemplate the superior prosperity of another without uneasy emotion, is certainly covetousness in one of its grossest forms. Disguise it as we may, it is nothing less than the detestable and truly devilish sin of envy. "He that hasteth to be rich, hath an

evil eye," Prov. xxviii. 22. We would fain reduce our neighbour to our own level: and, if we cannot do this in fact, we strive at least as fully as may be to effect it in opinion. We depreciate his prosperity, represent his successes as slight and inconsiderable, and labour to make ourselves and others believe that the current rumours upon the subject are exceedingly exaggerated. Or, if the increase of his wealth is too considerable and too well authenticated to admit of this species of affected incredulity, we turn to the means of his success, and seek in them the occasion for decrying him. If we cannot, with any show of likelihood, assail their morality, we suggest that at all events his prosperity is not the result of his own merit or his own skill, and then we comfort ourselves by the stupid adage, that some men are born lucky. In other instances, while we allow, with apparent frankness, that in some things he goes beyond us, yet we fail not to soothe our self-complacency by subjoining that, in higher respects, our condition is very far to be preferred. But as a last resort, should all our palliations fail, fortune is fickle, and there is hope of a reverse; and we prophesy, yes, we prophesy that things will not continue as they are; and we cite the many cases in which, under our own observation, men have been plunged from the heights of success to the depths of poverty. And oh, if our malignant predictions should be fulfilled, right happy men are we; our turn for triumph is arrived, and fully do we avail ourselves of it, even while in decent dissimulation we wear the guise of sympathy and regret. In one and the same event, our sagacity is vindicated, and our envy gratified.

And this leads us to remark, that the same sort of emotion is very common in its converse direction;

that is, we feel a real satisfaction in the losses and calamities of others. Rochefoucault says, that men are always pleased with the misfortunes of their friends; and, though the sentiment is severe, yet unhappily it is not altogether untrue. Indeed, where there is any degree of regret at the success of another, there will of necessity be some gratification in his reverses. The idea of being gratified by distress is, however, so shocking, that men in general repel the accusation with indignation and horror; and the emotion is so utterly at variance with the entire spirit and philanthropy of the gospel, that it would seem almost incredible that it could ever find its way into the heart of one who professes to be the follower of Christ. Yet where is the reflecting man, who has studied and investigated his own character, who will say that in the misfortunes of another he never experienced any feeling but that of unmixed regret? If an individual be out of our sphere, it is in general a matter of indifference whether he be successful or not; or if his pursuits be altogether different from our own, we are very careless as to their issue. In these cases there is no appeal to our selfishness, but let him only come within our limit, and let his engagements be similar to our own, and there instantly, in the unrenewed heart, commences that play of rivalry which will never cease till its object be removed, or till the grace of God bring in the pure and happy reign of righteousness, where love shall have no opposition and no restraint. Let the professedly christian trader or merchant say, when a rival trader has lost his business or been subject to a train of commercial disasters, whether his own mind has not been the subject of a sensible satisfaction. It would be a waste of words to at-

tempt to show how purely diabolical is such a temper ; for the shame with which it is almost universally regarded is a sufficient evidence of the prevalent impression of its extreme turpitude.

On the other hand, it is the characteristic of christian love that "it envieth not;" and where it rules the heart, there will be a noble and unrestricted generosity of triumph in the successes of our neighbours, and a correspondent genuine sympathy in their calamities. Each will affect us as truly and as naturally as if we ourselves were their subjects. Anything short of this does not come up to the requisition of the law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." Thus, therefore, we arrive at the conclusion, that where our desire for personal aggrandisement prevents us from regarding the successes of others with a gratification as sincere as that produced by our own prosperity, we fail of our duty, and are convicted as transgressors of the law. The affection which leads to such a result is unquestionably sinful, and he who is under its influence is a covetous man.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE PRACTICAL DEVELOPEMENT OF COVETOUSNESS.

THE rarity of self-knowledge is a common subject of complaint among moralists and teachers of religion. Whatever men may be in other respects, however varied the range of their studies, however extensive their intellectual acquisitions, there is in general a great reluctance to contemplate the state of their own affections ; and, like traders who are doubtful of their solvency, they turn with disrelish from the inquiries most important to their real interests. Covetousness is a sin of the heart, but few allow that it finds any place in them. It is therefore the more necessary to supply, not only the spiritual criteria by which its existence may be ascertained, but also the more palpable indications of its presence, which are to be found in the outward conduct ; and this is the object of the present chapter. It will hardly be necessary to insist upon the importance of this part of our inquiry, or to invite to it the special attention of the considerate and devout.

There are two general views which at once suggest themselves, as including the various forms in which covetousness is developed : the one is in the pursuit or acquisition, the other in the application of worldly possessions. Covetousness and in-

justice are always associated. Where the one exists in the affections, the other will certainly be exhibited in the practice. The pursuit or acquisition of wealth may be unjust in respect to three objects, and the neglect of the claims of one or other of these is an infallible result of the excessive desire for riches. One of its modes respects ourselves, another our neighbours, a third our God. It is true that they are intimately connected. We cannot be unjust to one without defrauding the other : but there are some forms of the covetous pursuit and acquisition of riches, which primarily and most obviously affect our own characters and enjoyments ; while others appear more strikingly, as practical violations of the two great commandments of the law, as dishonourable to God, and injurious to our fellow men. This classification therefore will be conveniently observed in the following remarks.

It will be at once admitted that there are duties which we owe to ourselves. Let no man underrate their importance ; for it is demonstrable that we are as strongly bound to them, as to duties of any other class. In fact, the nature of the obligation is in all cases the same ; and he who trifles with it when his own character is primarily concerned, will be quite as likely to do so when the claims of others and the rights of God are brought into question. All duty has an ultimate reference to the will and glory of our Maker and Legislator ; and however various may be its proximate and immediate objects, its neglect in any case is a practical spurning of the Divine authority. Hence the man who is void of christian self-respect is neither a good member of civil society, nor a good subject of God's moral government.

The wrongs inflicted upon us by others are usually capable of easy remedy. But if we wrong ourselves, the evil is twofold; the outrage and its punishment are both our own: and of all afflictions, the most intolerable is the judgment of a man upon himself, for his own sin against his own interests. The punishment often treads upon the heels of the sin; and even in this life, few things are more common than to find man his own victim and his own avenger, enduring evils for which there is little sympathy from without, and every aggravation from within. It is likely, that this will constitute no inconsiderable portion of the pains of perdition,—a mind set in array against itself, its own judge and its own executioner, for the wrongs which it alone has inflicted, and which it alone is eternally to endure.

It may be laid down as a general rule, that the sacrifice of a greater good in order to secure a smaller is an injustice to ourselves. In the scale of God's gifts, as has been remarked, wealth sustains a low and subordinate rank. Hence, where any individual regards and pursues it as an object of primary importance, and so neglects other and more estimable blessings, he sins against his own interests, and that, not unfrequently, to a serious amount. Health may be taken as an example, and, under ordinary circumstances, he who pursues after riches to the prejudice of this blessing, essentially wrongs himself. The reason is obvious: wealth at best is but the means for living, but health is life itself. Its injury, therefore, is the actual sacrifice of the end to secure the means. In this respect, as in several others, "he that hateth covetousness shall prolong his days," Prov. xxviii. 16: for covetous-

ness is a sin which, in a thousand instances, like an inward ulcer, eats away a man's life.

It is allowed that there are persons so unhappily situated as to be obliged to abridge life in order to live at all. Some employments are almost invariably injurious to health, in which, nevertheless, it appears to be the design of Providence that large masses of men should engage. Yet, even in these, it might be shown that the undue desire of aggrandizement frequently leads to an unnecessary exposure to prejudicial agencies. We are taught in Scripture that there is "a sin unto death," 1 John v. 16, one which God visits with temporal death, and that there are also transgressions which he punishes by sickness and feebleness of body, 1 Cor. xi. 30. So, by his permission, if not by his actual appointment, certain instances of forgetfulness of him, or neglect of his providential direction, have had a similar issue. Individuals who have shaped their own condition in life, independently of Divine arrangement, have come into situations, and been subjected to labours, exceedingly unfavourable to health, and eventually have become the victims of their own indiscretion. In these and the like cases, however, some effort frequently might, and, where it can be done without over-stepping the line of duty, always ought to be made to become disengaged from such pernicious occupations. But whether or not persons so situated can turn to employments more suitable, their cases are manifestly exceptions, and, as such, confirmations of the rule. The evil which we have in view is that slavish toiling, that absorbing assiduity in business, that pushing out our engagements to the utmost limit of physical power, that perpetual

tension of all our faculties both of body and mind, resulting in exhaustion which no food can replace—in fatigue which no sleep can refresh—in prostration of the energies which no medicine can remedy. Every one who knows the commercial world, can cite numberless examples of men who have made this sort of sacrifice without the shadow of necessity, and who, when expostulated with upon the subject, have not been able even to frame a plausible excuse for their indiscretion. It is to these that our remarks apply, and he who makes this sacrifice, whether partially or entirely, unless he is under the most imperious necessity, and is the victim of a concurrence of circumstances over which he has really no control, does himself a wrong, of which it is difficult to say, whether the injustice or the folly be the greater.

Does the offender in this sort allege as an apology, the advantages which his family and the church of God may derive from his exertions?—this can avail only on the supposition that to these objects of his solicitude, the prolongation of his life, and the preservation of his energies, both physical and mental, are of smaller importance than the trifling addition of wealth, which their sacrifice may be able to procure. But this supposition is altogether inadmissible. If usefulness be the matter in question, the full engrossing of his time, and the abridgment of his activity and his life, are evils for which his gains, even if entirely devoted to the cause of God, will make but poor amends. For the benefit of mankind, and for the service of the church, far more is to be done by the application of his personal agency, by the fervour of his intercessions, by his devoted and holy life, than by any amount of

property which he will be able to bestow. And is the preservation of his health and his life of little consequence to his family? Surely no apology was ever so ill-chosen. What riches will make the widowhood of her, whom he has vowed to "love and cherish," any other than a state of unspeakable calamity? What can compensate her for the husband of her youth, the guardian and director of her matronly years, and, as she had hoped, the stay and companion of her decline? Ask her "who is a widow indeed, and desolate," at what price, if it were the will of the Lord, she would consent to buy back her bereavement, and she will weigh you down empires as chaff, for the smile and tenderness of him who is now in the dust. Is it to such a spirit that a man of sensibility dares to proffer a few miserable acres, as the purchase of his heart's blood? And what to a child can make amends for the absence of his father's counsel and aid? Is there a christian in the lowest rank of the church, who would not shrink in horror from unheard-of riches, could they only be procured, by the child of his bitterest enemy becoming fatherless? And will he deal more cruelly with his own? What a wretched estimate must that man form of the temper of his offspring, who supposes that they would exchange the health and life of a father,

"For all the wealth that sinews bought and sold,  
Have ever earned?"

Let him seek what disguises he may, whether for himself or for others, the unchristian estimate and desire of riches is the principle of his destructive exertions. The suicides of this description are frightfully numerous; and if an inquest were to be

held over each, of which TRUTH should be the coroner, the verdict in all cases would be, "Covetousness."

The foregoing remarks, with some limitation, are applicable to that absorbing pursuit of riches, which leaves neither time nor energy for the cultivation of the mind. It is indeed melancholy to remark, how many men of education and of considerable natural endowments, are thus wholly engrossed by occupations purely unintellectual. These, be they ever so prosperous, can supply the means only for pleasures of a far lower description than those for which such individuals are qualified, by a happy conjuncture of native parts and early mental cultivation. And yet, frequently, it is not until they are compelled to retire from the more busy scenes of life, that they come to appreciate the comparative value of the good they have sought, and that which they have neglected. In the minds of men of this class, when advanced in age, there is often a painful sense of the wrongs which, in this respect, they have done themselves. The evil days are come, in which they are compelled to say, that they have no longer pleasure in the engagements upon which they have spent their manhood, while they are equally without those resources, which, in their ennobling character, are second only to the influences of Divine grace. Their habits are so confirmed, and the suppleness of their minds has so wholly ceased, that it is impossible for them to apply themselves to the studies which captivated their youth. They have, in fact, lost a large proportion of the acquisitions of that period, and are insensible to beauties which then held them in a sort of enchantment. Their only prospect is that of a

dreaming unintellectual old age, compassionated at once by the cultivated associates of their youth, and the followers of the example of their maturity.

There is one class of blessings which may be, and often are sacrificed in the pursuit and acquirement of wealth, which in every case might have been retained, and the loss of which no other good can possibly repair. It will be at once perceived that we allude to spiritual blessings; and it need hardly be added that when we consent to forego these, we inflict the grossest injustice upon ourselves. Upon this subject there is a not uncommon delusion in the idea that old age (when an individual has amassed all that he needs, and is by infirmity prevented from amassing more) is a period so suited to retirement and reflection, that it will enable the sensual professor to repair all his spiritual losses, and to make full preparation for the heavenly world. But who will guarantee to us that our probation will be protracted to that period? "for what is your life? it is even a vapour that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away." Or who shall say that our fate shall not be that of one whose reasonings were not unlike our own, who, having made all necessary provision, and having "much goods laid up for many years," was, upon the threshold of fruition, arrested by the voice of a jealous God,— "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee." If to secure that measure of wealth which we now possess, we have already sacrificed much spiritual good, who will ensure us against making further concessions to the spirit of the world, till, perhaps, "in the breeze of the evening," the voice of the Lord God, walking in our paradise, may find us as it found our first parents, naked?

Upon what principle can we regard old age as suited to the recovery of blessings which the energy of unsubdued manhood was unable to retain? The mere retirement from the active employment of life will work no change upon our minds. We may alter our condition, we may seek other climates and other occupations, but these, of themselves, will not give back forfeited grace, nor subdue earthly desires. Old age, the period of rigid habit, of feeble faculty, of confirmed worldliness, when the finer sensibilities are lost, and the buoyancy of earlier life has disappeared, when the grasshopper is a burden, and the silver cord is actually loosening, is the most unsuitable time that can be imagined for renovating our religious character, and pluming our wing for heaven. At such a period, eminent christians find it difficult to retain any considerable degree of their spiritual sensibility and power: and the diminution of physical vitality is often accompanied, even in them, by such a prostration of mental energy, as to render their devotional exercises in no small degree laborious. In their case, indeed, there is special assistance, because there is special need. He who has loved his own which are in the world, loves them unto the end; so that, with child-like feebleness of body, they are possessed of child-like simplicity of spirit. The current of their affections, though apparently sluggish, is yet deep, and in the right direction; but how will it fare with him who hopes to divert the course of a stream just as it is about to enter the ocean, or anticipates that it will then cut for itself a new channel, or be restrained within strange banks?

It is undeniable that, in the grace of God, there is sufficient energy to renew the spiritual youth of

the worldly professor, so that he shall again mount up with wings as the eagle. But can he who has devoted the whole of his energies to the pursuit of worldly good, look up to God with any confidence as he approaches the altar to offer up the wretched relics of his sensual life? Let him ponder that awful denunciation;—"Ye brought the torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this at your hand? saith the Lord. But cursed be the deceiver, which hath in his flock a male, and voweth, and sacrificeth unto the Lord a corrupt thing: for I am a great King, saith the Lord of hosts, and my name is dreadful among the heathen," Mal. i. 13, 14. Can one upon whom rests the spirit of such a curse, anticipate that there will be given back to him those gracious influences which he has foregone for the sake of riches, and which, even now, he would not seek could he any longer persevere in his sordid occupation? If he can draw near to God with an unblushing countenance and an unfaltering heart, his condition must indeed be hopeless. All that can be reasonably anticipated in such a case, by the most liberal charity, is an old age of shame and contrition, not indeed unmingled with hope, but equally not untainted by apprehension.

There are few spectacles more melancholy than old age without resources, and yet this is commonly the state of those who have allowed the world to engross all the interest of their manhood, and have outlived their power of active exertion. What can riches do for one in such a condition? They cannot buy back the friends whom he has lost, or from whom his covetousness has estranged him; or, if they could, he is without the sensibilities needful to the enjoyment of friendship. Luxury is out of the

question. He no longer discerns between good and evil; he cannot taste what he eats and drinks; he hears no more "the voice of singing men and singing women;" and to those whose attendance is hardly procured by his riches, he is continually a burden. Ostentation has lost its charms; he has no delight in show, and splendour, and equipage, but altogether an aversion from them. Quietude would now be the greatest boon, but to that he is a stranger, for he is discontented with himself, and to others he is peevish and capricious. His querulousness and his tears are thought to be the mere indications of dotage, whereas, in fact, they are the result of his perceptions of the truth, and of the bitter judgment which he passes on his own folly. Yet, to the last, he preserves inviolate the selfishness of his character; and the only gleam of satisfaction of which he is now capable, is from the feeble flame which avarice occasionally lights up in the charnel-house of his affections. As he has lived to himself, so he eventually dies to himself; for there is no sacred and reverent sorrow to attend him to the grave, and no precious memories to embalm his dust.\*

\* Avarice has often been satirized, but rarely, if ever, has the picture exceeded the reality. Even Pope's "ruling passion" of the dying miser is not without its parallels in real life, and in some respects is, what cannot be said of several of his other sketches, so true to nature, that one might almost conjecture it had been suggested by some actual occurrence. The following incident might have served for his original, had it not happened many years afterwards. The father of a late well-known senator expired as he ceased to utter the words,—*"Oh, Rosevale! Rosevale! I cannot give up Rosevale!"* The story is well authenticated, though here given with a fictitious name.

It may possibly be urged that wealth is a talent of so great utility as to justify and even to demand some sacrifices. This is granted ; but does not at all affect our present argument, for no one will be guilty of the absurdity of affirming that, for its sake, we ought to forego blessings of higher value and greater utility : nor will it be contended that human life is not far more important than the means for its preservation. If the question is to be determined by the test of utility, intellectual power is capable of exerting a far more effective religious influence upon society, especially when combined with respectability of condition, than the most abundant riches in the hands of a mere man of the world. Above all, spiritual gifts and attainments are in all cases to be preferred, not only for the sake of the possessors, but for the benefit of mankind at large, to the utmost imaginable amount of wealth. These truths are so trite and obvious, that, were it not for the obtuseness and perversity of the covetous mind, one might almost be ashamed of insisting so frequently upon their importance.

Besides, there is delusion, if not hypocrisy in this plea. "This he saith, not that he careth for the poor; but because he hath the bag, and that which is put therein." He who pursues riches to the prejudice or loss of better blessings, is so manifestly besotted by covetousness that it is the extreme of folly to expect that his gains will be devoted to the advantage of mankind ; and the affectation of great solicitude for the religious uses of wealth, in him who seeks it to the diminution of his own spirituality, indicates a melancholy degree of blindness of mind, or of corruptness of heart.

These remarks have introduced us to the consideration of those modes of active covetousness which more immediately wrong our neighbour. In order to this, it is not necessary that we should be guilty of direct fraud in the gross sense of the term. We are capable of still greater injustice, and yet preserve our reputation. The first social duties are domestic. The most sacred earthly obligation is that which binds a man to his wife. The type of that love is the most sublime and affecting in the history of the world: "even as Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it," Eph. v. 25. Next to this comes our obligation to the love of our offspring; and where marital and paternal love exist in their proper power, the enjoyments of domestic life are inferior only to those which prepare us for, and give us the foretaste of Paradise. Nothing can possibly justify the alienation, either wholly or in part, of the affections due to these relations; and whatever diverts them from their rightful channel, is a serious wrong to those whose interests we are most bound to cultivate. A faithful husband checks the first emotion resembling attachment in any other direction than the heart of his own wife. He who gives his love to another is justly infamous: but of what moment is it, so far as the affections are concerned, whether the object of a strange love be a person or a thing? The injustice in the latter instance, is as real if not as cognizable and distressing as in the former. The parent who withdraws his substance from the uses of his family, or dissipates it in riot and licentiousness, we avoid as an unnatural wretch; and though the wrong be less observable, it is equally a violation of the obligation of the case, when the head of a

family allows the pursuit of wealth so fully to engross his affections as to leave them few and feeble for the treasures of his own.

“He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house,” Prov. xv. 27. Covetousness is a chill and damp upon affection, an appetite—passion is too noble a name—at once gross and absorbing. The mind perpetually under its influence, it soon succeeds in depriving of everything like lively susceptibility, and bringing so fully into its own sordid character that it never resumes those noble and generous emotions by which it may formerly have been distinguished. There is probably no gross breach of the marriage contract, no positive cruelty either to the wife or children. A certain portion of the duties and of the respect belonging to each may still be observed, but the spirit of those duties is departed; the heart is wanting, and with it the tender sympathy, the ever watchful love, which anticipated every desire and soothed every sorrow, however trifling; the ready smile, the cordial greeting, the solicitude which was a perpetual charm and a constant guard to the sacred hearth. There is a sensible estrangement of tenderness; the mind turns from home to the scene of business; the harsh collision with the things of the world is more congenial than the play of those gentle charities which were once sweeter than all other things. Formerly, when the man had to go forth into the world, he went with the fortitude supplied by a consciousness of duty, and he bound close to his heart the love of his home. But now he goes as to his proper sphere, and the energies and ardour which slumber at home, or give place to moodiness and selfish reveries, wake up as at the touch of an enchanter. The thoughts of his domestic ties still

occasionally intervene, but now they are made the servants and apologists to his covetous pursuit of wealth, and he strives to persuade himself that his avidity is the result only of the strength and sincerity of his interest in the happiness of his family. This change may not be so apparent in youth or manhood, but, as the chill of age comes down upon the spirit, as selfishness becomes inveterately confirmed by long-established habits of covetous acquisition, unless his mind has wholly lost the power of perception, it is painfully manifest even to the unhappy man himself.

Many a one who, through all his exertions in business, has looked forward to his ultimate retirement with a satisfactory competence, and has anticipated, so far as they can consist with the calmness and sobriety of declining age, the renewal of the domestic delights of his youth,—when his principal desire is realized, wonders at the absence of that peace and satisfaction which he once enjoyed, and which he had supposed would return at his bidding. He forgets that he has dissipated the energy of his affections in the world, that he has designedly mixed himself with the concerns of life to the destruction of the finer sensibilities of his nature, that he has loved wealth more than his home, and that the means which he has employed to ensure it have gone directly to destroy those capabilities of the heart which are essential to its true enjoyment. But it is thus that a wise Providence, even in this life, requites the wrongs which we inflict upon our families.

This subject suggests other views of still higher importance. The spirit of the head of a house very soon, in a greater or less degree, pervades his house-

hold. If such an individual be of an imperious and determined character, his children and servants will catch something of the decision of his manner, his tones, and his temper; if, of a gentle yielding spirit, the disposition of the others, though naturally harsh, will be mitigated. In a house where the master is of a generous, noble tone of mind, we shall find in his dependants the studious effort to shun what has the semblance of meanness or dishonourable artifice. If the head of a family be a covetous man, one of a grasping, sordid spirit, the result will be, that in time, the members of his household will be assimilated to him. How, indeed, can it be otherwise? If the children of any family hear little or no conversation but such as relates to business and speculations; if they perceive that the highest ambition of their parent is to drive a good bargain, and that, in his estimation, the deepest disgrace is to be overreached in any such transaction, but one result can be reasonably anticipated. The younger branches of such families grow up with a ten-fold measure of the worldly spirit of him, to whose pernicious influence they have thus been subjected.

Beyond this, it is to be recollected that the heads of families are responsible for the direct education of their children, and, in a degree, for the religious instruction of their domestics. But if such individuals devote the whole of their time and their energies to the pursuit of wealth, they deprive those whom God has thus committed to their care, of that assistance and direction which they are bound to supply. They may suppose that they sufficiently perform their parental duties by placing their children under the care of skilful instructors; but however serviceable such assistances may be, and undoubt-

edly are, they do not remove the parent's responsibility. He may not, it is true, be qualified to superintend the intellectual cultivation of his children, but their moral education, the bringing "them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord," the preserving them from depraved associates and depraving examples, the constant, affectionate praying with, and interceding for them,—these are within the capacity of every christian parent, and he who neglects them, and thus sacrifices the welfare of his children to the accumulation of riches, must not be surprised if, from this sowing to the flesh, he reap, in their characters, the harvest of corruption. However insensible he may now be to these truths, the probability is, that should he preserve any degree of spiritual sensation to an advanced period of life, and should he then, as the natural result of his neglect, see his children cast off the fear of God, and the form of piety,—he will sincerely and bitterly lament his own folly, and vainly wish that he could recal those opportunities of modelling and restraining their minds, which he so wickedly allowed to pass away unimproved.

It is a bad omen of a man's character as a citizen of the world, and especially as a christian philanthropist, that he exhibits little concern for the moral condition of those who are of his bones and of his flesh. He who has no proper feeling for the welfare of his own family, is not likely to be greatly interested for others, to whom he is bound by less constraining ties. That he should be careless of the happiness of mankind at large, need awaken no surprise, nor that, in his pursuit of wealth, he should occasionally even trench on the rights of his neighbour. Supposing that he should eschew positive

fraud, yet with his inordinate appetite for wealth, there is every probability that he will extend his business to the very utmost that his capital or his powers of management will warrant. And the line of demarcation is so indistinct, and the temptations to still more comprehensive speculation are so numerous, that it is remarkable if he does not overstep his proper limits, and place his own credit with the interests of his family and of his commercial connexions, in circumstances of considerable peril. It is melancholy to remark the increased laxity of christians in their notions upon bankruptcies and failures of a like kind. There was a time (and that within the memory of some now living) when on this subject there existed a sterner tone of morality both in the temper of our laws and in the habits of thought among christian men of business. The rage for making large fortunes has generated a spirit of unbounded speculation, which, in its turn, has proved the source of a morality equally latitudinarian. Injustice, the injustice of enterprise is tolerated, and while fortunate, even applauded. The epoch of a man's success in life is now not unfrequently his appearance in the gazette. Sins, which our ancestors would have branded with infamy, or frowned into seclusion, stalk abroad, even on our marts, with unvisored and unblushing faces, and take their seats in the society of the great and noble.

Closely connected with this extravagance of speculation, is extravagance of expenditure. The man who has an inordinate attachment to wealth, if he is not positively avaricious, is not satisfied unless he can impress others with a high estimate of his success in business, and his consequent resources. He who unduly values riches, will not fail to desire the

reputation of being a rich man. Hence all sorts of artifices are employed. Splendid equipages, luxurious entertainments, costly and fashionable apparel, are some of the means resorted to for the sake of effect; and these not only encroach upon the resources of beneficence, but frequently tend also to encumber the fortune of him who is ambitious of this sort of distinction. It would be some satisfaction were these remarks applicable only to large places, and opulent persons; but the same spirit appears to pervade all classes, and all localities. In country towns and other small communities, where busybodies and tattlers, and all sorts of small scandal are especially encouraged, there is a perpetual rivalry kept up, particularly in the matter of dress; and the wives of tradesmen, and even of artisans, in order to convey an exaggerated idea of their husbands' business and resources, resort to almost every sort of extravagance in apparel. To be suspected of the heinous disgrace of poverty, is an evil so great, that it must be averted at any cost, often at that of honesty and a good conscience, almost always at the expense of modesty and christian propriety.

In the case of servants, who readily catch the spirit, and imitate the manners of their masters and mistresses, the effects are frequently still more deplorable. Not rarely they have recourse to frauds and petty thefts; and female servants, in order to gratify the appetite for show, are, in many instances, betrayed into the grossest licentiousness. Yet the success of these artifices is by no means answerable to the anxiety and expense lavished upon them. Few men form their judgment of their neighbours' solvency by the decorations of their wives and children. A dis-

trust of appearances is their most remarkable effect upon mankind at large. The consciousness of guile in ourselves leads us to suspect the like in others, and hence costly and splendid attire is usually considered an evidence of nothing but the fondness for ostentation of its wearer.

† In ancient Sparta, this subject was deemed of so much importance to the weal of the state, as to deserve specific legislative provision, and no Lacedæmonian woman, of any pretensions to modesty, was allowed to appear in public except in plain and unadorned attire. Ornamented and gay apparel was confined to females of licentious habits. In the spirit of this law, a certain sophist, mentioned by St. Clement of Alexandria,\* when he would delineate virtue and vice respectively, represented the one as standing in a dress of pure and modest white, and the other decked in costly and gorgeous raiment. And far higher authority has ordained that women should “adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shame-facedness and sobriety; not with broidered hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; but (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works,” 1 Tim. ii. 9, 10; or, as it is elsewhere expressed more at large, “whose adorning, let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel; but let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price,” 1 Pet. iii. 3, 4. In the observance of these counsels, there are involved moral considerations so numerous and so weighty, that it may well be questioned, whether

\* Pæd. l. ii. c. 10.

they receive from the christian ministry all the attention which they deserve. That which was not beneath the dignity of apostolic precepts, need not be esteemed any dishonour to evangelical pulpits; and it is certainly to be desired, that the congregation of God's sanctuary, in appearance at least, should be palpably distinguishable from that of the ball-room and the theatre.

There is one class of persons to whom ministers, in this respect, might probably render material service; I allude to the genteel poor, those who by the accident of birth, or some similar circumstance, have been brought to associate with individuals much more wealthy than themselves. They are unwilling to lose their place in society, (for none are more jealous of their rank than those who have least the means of supporting it;) and to avoid this, they are compelled to abridge themselves of many personal comforts, while anything like a due degree of beneficence is altogether out of the question. There is something absurd in their efforts to maintain the appearance of wealth, when every one is perfectly aware of their straitened circumstances; yet while custom exerts, even among christian professors, a sway so absolute, it requires no common strength of mind to enable individuals of this class to appear as they really are. But if, through the efforts of christian ministers, something could be done to render personal appearance a matter of comparatively small consideration, and to release those to whom we have referred from that bondage of usage, under which many of them, though they have not the courage to shake it off, are yet often exceedingly uncomfortable; if they could thus be enabled at once to preserve such associates as are

really valuable, to retain the comforts which they are now compelled to sacrifice, and to answer the demands of christian beneficence—a great personal benefit would be conferred, and the interests of morality and true religion would be materially subserved. It is not alleged that this servility to custom is by any means justifiable; but the circumstances of the individuals in question are nevertheless worthy of some commiseration.

Equal forbearance, however, must not be extended to the disposition in some of its other shapes. Its effect upon men rising in the world is often particularly lamentable, and merits the heaviest reprehension. Many christian professors of this order, when comparatively poor, were laudably self-denying, and that, not merely because of the straitness of their circumstances, but that thus they might be enabled to contribute to the cause of God and the uses of beneficence. God honoured this spirit, and gave his blessing to their basket and their store. And now, if they have not become positively avaricious, they have fallen into the extravagance of covetousness, and have become ambitious of that reputation for opulence which is to be acquired by profuse expenditure. Their poverty and frugality have disappeared together; the proportion of their personal expense has strangely increased; no longer do they deny themselves that they may help the indigent, but now the cause of God is made to suffer for their luxury and ostentation. How many now go naked that they may have their “purple and fine linen!” How many pine in want, that they may fare “sumptuously every day!” How many heathen, abroad and at home, drop into eternity, unpitied and unforgiven, that they may gather round

them all the fleeting joys of life, "drinking wine in bowls, and caring not for the affliction of Joseph."

Yet however deeply the prevalency of such habits may be lamented, it cannot occasion much surprise in reflective minds. The benevolence required in the christian—the self-denying, self-sacrificing, heroic, enduring benevolence—cannot consist with the absorbing, worldly spirit, the cold, grasping, calculating selfishness, which characterizes the ordinary modes of acquiring riches. It is not the man whose body is jaded, whose mind is distracted, whose affections are dulled by the power of the demon who holds his "place of pride," in the spirit of the wealth-hunter; it is not he who has no time but for the counting-house, and no energies but for the exchange, who will seek out the haunts of meritorious and afflicted penury, the abodes of destitution and sorrow, and will rejoice in the opportunity for rescuing a soul from sin and shame as one that has found great spoil. It is not on such an one that the eye falls but to bless, of whom the ear hears only to bear witness. No; let him eke out what apologies he may, he too well knows that the cry of the poor wakes but a faint echo in his affections, and that to him the song of the widow's heart has but little melody.

But while man changes, and this busy and minute world of ours presents a constant ebb and flow of property and circumstances, the calm heaven above us remains the same. The awful dweller there announces himself as the Immutable; and his holy law, with its obligations and its sanctions, is eternally unaltered. There the commandment stands "graven in the rock for ever,"—"Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself." We may encumber

it with our glosses, and attempt so to qualify it, that it may prove innoxious to us ; but nothing can affect either its comprehensive simplicity, or its steady obligation, and when this world shall have passed away for ever, its sacred sanctions shall stand forth to determine on the irrevocable doom of man. And yet it is upon this that we presume to play off our quirks and quibbles, as if, like human law, it might be evaded by some technical informality, as if we could so mystify it as to perplex the decisions of the day of retribution, as if the eye of God could be dimmed by the pernicious sophistry with which we strive to beguile our own consciences.

The demand of this law upon a just proportion of our property is peremptory and inviolable. Its obligation is quite as strong as that by which a buyer is bound to pay the stipulated price for his commodities. He who declines admitting the one, as truly defrauds his neighbour, as he who refuses to comply with the other : in neither case is it matter of choice or indifferency. A defaulter in the latter instance is seized by the force of human law, and that promptly ; for the law of man has no place for mercy. He who fails in the other is allowed to remain at large, because the Divine executive is full of long-suffering. But, though God waits long for our penitence and turning to him, yet is his stroke the surer and the heavier when it falls. For the breach of human law, even after its sentence has been pronounced, we may make restitution ; but let us deeply ponder the fact, that when once the law of God shall rise up, arrayed in its proper terrors, there will be "no place for repentance," no "sacrifice for sin," no commutation of judgment. All then will be inexorable, unchangeable, eternal.

These remarks apply with equal, if not with greater force, to those modes of pursuing and acquiring wealth which more immediately affect the rights of God. Such are all which beguile our love from him, which enfeeble our faith, diminish our joy, or render our devotions cold and spiritless. These, though they involve the most traitorous ingratitude and the basest injustice, probably incur from christian professors the smallest measure of self-reproach. One reason is, that to the eye dimmed by sense, they are not so observable in themselves; another, that their indications are not such as readily catch the notice of others. Injustice of some kinds, towards ourselves or society, affects our sensible comfort or our reputation in that degree, that it cannot escape our detection. When an individual neglects the best interests of his family, though he strive to stifle the remonstrances of his conscience by arguing that his want of care for the souls of his children results from an amiable solicitude for their worldly prosperity, yet still the unhappy results of his indifferency will occasionally, and to his chagrin, force themselves upon his attention. But his God,—his affections wander from him; that however, he reasons, is the necessary effect of the employment to which Providence has called him. His devotions are cold and languid, but the lapse into this state has been very gradual, and his power of spiritual sensibility has proportionably been diminished: and then, mark you, he will argue with a grave and pious air, that diligence in business is as much a duty as religious fervour, and to provide for his own house as binding as to trust in God. The most common resource, however, in all such cases, is an attempt to accom-

moderate matters by promises of future munificence. At the very moment that he is becoming increasingly selfish and avaricious, he engages that when his condition shall more fully justify such a course of conduct, he will abound in good works. Then shall He, whose is "the silver and the gold, and the cattle upon a thousand hills," receive a handsome proportion of his sordidly acquired possessions, or he will be very "virtuous with pen and ink," as an ancient writer (St. Basil) expresses it, and out of the gains of the idolatry of his life he will bequeath a munificent legacy to his Maker. The deluded man seems to imagine that in that world of truth and wisdom, he can negotiate promises, which no one in this fallible state would for a moment think of accepting. It might awaken his horror, could he read those awful words with which the hand of God has endorsed the worthless documents, thus presented before the eternal throne: "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such an one as thyself: but I will reprove thee, and set these things in order before thine eyes. Now consider this, ye that forget God, lest I tear you in pieces, and there be none to deliver," *Psa. l. 21, 22*. But no; the shadow over his spirit daily deepens; the misgivings which once disturbed him are hushed, and he sinks down into the desperate and fatal torpor of his darling sin.

There are some questions connected with the accumulation of wealth, of which it will here be necessary to take notice. Happily, there is no need to employ any arguments to prove that, in its grossest form, avarice is a heinous and despicable sin. Upon that subject there is but one opinion, either in the church or the world. Mankind have agreed

to describe the wretch who is guilty of this most debasing vice, by the term MISER (miserable); and whether we regard the condition of the unhappy being himself, or the results of his sin upon others, we perceive the fitness of the appellation. Look at his character and circumstances as we may, we see nothing but misery on every hand, and in every prospect. It certainly is a source of satisfaction that, spite of the prevalency of covetousness, there is, even to this sin, a boundary which cannot be passed without involving the transgressor in universal and irretrievable disgrace. And yet there are such who make pretensions to christianity. A christian miser! A christian cutthroat!

The less obvious forms of this vice, however, are by no means rare, and I fear it must be added, by no means generally disreputable. They are defended on every hand by a phalanx of plausible excuses, which, however unsatisfactory to a tender and enlightened conscience, are yet not unfrequently urged by christian professors, with the utmost earnestness and apparent sincerity. It is therefore important that we should go a little more at large into the subject of the accumulation of wealth.

It is impossible upon this question to lay down detailed rules which shall be applicable to every case. The remark of Mr. Cecil, that "an honest heart is the best casuist," though almost universally true, is here particularly appropriate; and it may be safely affirmed, that no one in simplicity and godly sincerity, laying aside fleshly wisdom, ever applied himself to the consideration of this question, and sought respecting it, for Divine direction, without securing every satisfaction which he could desire. But in a large proportion of christian professors,

there is a manifest absence of evenhanded impartiality in respect to worldly possessions; and they are therefore wholly unqualified to judge on the correctness of their own habits in thought and action. Of some, indeed, the estimation of wealth is so high, and the consequent affection for it so strong, that they regard it as a sort of duty to accumulate as largely as possible, and, in their judgment, there is no amount of riches to be amassed which they ought not to endeavour to secure. To reason with these persons is evidently useless. It is to be feared, indeed, that some of them are the subjects of that judicial blindness with which God doth occasionally visit the presumptuous sinner. At all events, they are so besotted by the fumes of this world, as to be beyond the reach of human argument and persuasion.

There is yet one species of reasoning, the force of which they may be made to feel, but it is that which God alone can employ, the argument of the rod; and this sometimes, when accompanied by an abundant measure of gracious influence, delivers them from their swinish transformation, and gives them back to the form and erectness of man. This may account to us for those visitations of severe and complicated calamity which we occasionally witness on the worldly professor. He has resisted every exhortation and warning of Scripture, he has refused the merciful agency of the Spirit, he has set at naught the counsels of ministerial and christian friendship, and now God arises to try the force of the only argument, the only species of persuasion to which he is accessible, or from which there is the smallest hope of success. First, the strokes come gently, and far apart; then, with a rapidity and

force which stun and almost overwhelm ; till, at length, the untractable man is stripped of all he most dearly loved, and with Job, he can sit in the ashes, and say, "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither." Happy will it be, if now at length, in the spirit of Job, and with the same sublimity of resignation, he can add, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away ; blessed be the name of the Lord." Then shall he know the fulfilment of that gracious promise,—“I will not contend for ever, neither will I be always wroth : for the spirit should fail before me, and the souls which I have made. For the iniquity of his covetousness was I wroth, and smote him : I hid me, and was wroth, and he went on frowardly in the way of his heart. I have seen his ways and will heal him : I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners,” Isa. lvii. 16—18. But this is by no means an invariable result of chastisement. Some still carry out their obstinacy, so that the only consequence of their calamity is that, like wounded wolves, they hide themselves in their dens and howl. Or if the visitations of Providence have not been so sweeping, their affections cling with increasing idolatry to what is left, and the Divine long-suffering at length says, “Why should ye be stricken any more ? Ye will revolt more and more,” Isa. i. 5.

Such unhappy persons we must leave, not without intercession, to the mercy of God. Our present inquiry respects a less intractable order of spirits. If any such individual is truly desirous to know whether, in the accumulation of property, he has committed sin, or to what degree he may lawfully carry out the principles by which he has hitherto

been actuated, his first inquiry should be into the real state of his own affections. If his delights in wealth be inordinate, it is morally certain that his conclusions respecting its accumulation will be incorrect. In other words, if he be covetous in principle, he will be avaricious in conduct. It strikes us as preposterous, upon the very mention of it, that one who unduly prizes money should be allowed to determine the amount which may lawfully be amassed. He, then, who would be led aright, but who, notwithstanding, is sensible of the incorrect state of his affections, should argue thus:—"In my present condition I am incapable of forming an accurate judgment upon this subject. I must, therefore, either act upon the judgment of others, or, which is far preferable, obtain that measure of Divine grace which shall enlighten my eyes, and cleanse my heart. In the mean time, my only security is in keeping very far within the limit to which, with my present views, it appears justifiable to extend my possessions." In such a conclusion the christian is safe, but he who, in this matter, goes to the utmost apparent boundary of right, is sure to pass the real limit of wrong.

The question, it is to be noted, is not what amount of wealth may be lawfully acquired, but what may be kept; what a christian may be allowed to accumulate for his own use, and that of those who are dependent upon him. Nor do we speak here of the hoarding up of money for its own sake; that, in every form, is avarice, and its unlawfulness, therefore, is not matter of question: but we refer to the accumulation from which an individual designs to derive an income for the maintenance of himself and his family. This is the only question

on which there is the smallest room for casuistry; for every other species of accumulation is, undoubtedly, an abomination in the sight of God.

Now, in this respect, it is very plain that there is a limit which the Bible will not allow us to overstep. Such a dissuasive as "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth," Matt. vi. 19, cannot signify that it is perfectly optional with every man what amount of riches he will heap together; it is clearly designed to suggest to us the idea of restriction. Like the exhortation, "Take no thought for to-morrow," and similar cautions, it is the intention of the Divine Teacher, to which, in every case, we must look, and by its spirit duly apprehended, we shall fulfil the purpose of the letter of the commandment. We are not left in doubt as to the specific design of the caution now before us. Our Lord adds, "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also." The law therefore forbids all accumulation of wealth which either arises from, or issues in the entanglement of the affections. From this there can be no appeal, nor any exception; for no sort of apology will avail to justify a breach of the Divine law, or an alienation of the Divine rights.

Let us look at another scriptural admonition which carries out these views yet more fully:—"Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God," Col. iii. 2, 3. The correct state of christian feeling, it will be perceived from this passage, is that in which worldly good shall have lost its fascination as truly as if natural death had passed upon the body. Such an abstraction the same apostle brings before us as matter of personal experience. "I am crucified with Christ; never-

theless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me : and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me," Gal. ii. 20.

Some of the contrary evils may probably be traced to the absence of accurate reasoning upon this subject. Men who begin life with the hope of providing comfortably for themselves and their families, are often very moderate in their desires, but, in consequence of the want of definite views, their feelings, as they prosper in the world, are no longer of the same sober and restrained kind. Their field of enterprise, with the probable amount of success, is constantly enlarging, and with their prospects their appetite for wealth is proportionably increased. The old complaint of the satirist is not more trite than appropriate, that as riches grow, so also does the love of riches : and from a higher authority we have it, that "he that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver ; nor he that loveth abundance with increase," Eccl. v. 10. What before appeared a satisfactory competency is now all but pauperism ; and if their condition were to be determined by the style and standard of their former desires, they would deem themselves the most afflicted of men. To such persons, the prohibition against laying up earthly treasure has altogether a different meaning from that which it had at the commencement of their career. That which they then would have esteemed covetous accumulation, they have now discovered to be quite lawful, nay, considering circumstances, even virtuous. And it requires no great sagacity to perceive that, as their prospects continue to enlarge, so will also be the amplitude which they will give to the scriptural admonition upon the subject, until,

eventually, they evade it altogether. It will always appear remote, and, like the sensible horizon, as they advance, will perpetually recede.

No man of common understanding, in moral truth, can doubt that this is covetousness. It is absurd to imagine for a moment, that the law of God is thus capable of taking any meaning and of being fitted to any state, just as the circumstances of men may change. If this sort of accommodation be allowed, there is an end of all morality; for by such legerdemain, no measure of licence is incapable of justification; and he who ventures on antinomianism so rank, will do well to meditate on the caution, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked," Gal. vi. 7.

It may be assumed, that there is a certain amount of wealth which will amply meet the reasonable desires of the christian, for himself, and his family. As to the actual sum necessary for this purpose, there may be a variety of opinion; but it is not to be disputed that a limit exists, beyond which our gains belong to the cause of God, and the uses of beneficence. Were the christian an absolute proprietor, he would be at liberty to increase his state and expenditure, just in proportion to the increase of his property. But this is altogether irreconcilable with the responsibility of a steward. To that, it is essential that, after due provision made out of our Lord's money, for our personal necessities and comforts, the residue should be applied to the purposes of the proprietor. We do not serve a hard master, who will deny us and ours the abundant enjoyments of life. He who is put in trust to the greatest amount, is allowed a munificent proportion for himself and his family; but

there remains a large mass of sacred property, which the steward must not place to his own account. If he transgress in this, it is at his proper peril.

The words of an ancient writer upon this subject are full of force. "From whom," says he, "did you receive your riches, and whence did you bring them? Did you not come naked out of your mother's womb, and shall you not return naked to the dust? Whence, then, is your present wealth? If you reply, 'It came by chance,' you are impious; if you confess that you received it from God, tell me, why it fell to your lot rather than that of another? God is not unjust in the unequal distribution of property; why then are you rich, and why is your neighbour poor? It is that you who are rich may receive a reward for the faithful dispensation of your possessions; while another is poor that he may obtain the recompense of his patience. When, therefore, you appropriate to yourself that wealth which belongs to many individuals, of which you are but the steward, you become a robber; for you detain that to which you have no right. It is the bread of the famishing which you eat; it is the clothes of the naked which you lock up in your chest; it is money which belongs to the destitute that you bury in the earth. This is a fair discourse, you reply, but gold is a much fairer thing. Thus does the covetous man talk when he hears us preach. For as men of polluted minds make discourses against uncleanness the fuel to their corruption, so also the covetous, hearing dissuasives from the love of money, conceive a yet more ardent passion for it."\*

\* Basil Mag. in Divites Avaros.—Ser. I.

The same author, in another of his discourses, refutes some of the pretences by which the lovers of money, in all ages, have attempted to excuse its unlawful accumulation. To the allegation of the uncertainty of the future, and the need to provide against contingencies, he replies, "Is not the use and the continuance of your wealth yet more uncertain? Or even, if you were secured against its loss, how can you make use of this apology, when you expend it in a thousand superfluities?" To those who attempt to justify their hoarding, by professions of concern for the interests of their families, he remarks, "This excuse for covetousness is plausible. You cover yourselves with the pretence of your children that you may satisfy your lusts. Is it from you that your son received his being? Is it not from God, to whom also he is indebted for continued preservation? Ought he then to hinder you from obeying the Divine commandments? The riches that you leave him will, perhaps, be the cause of his ruin, for who knows whether he will make a good or a bad use of them? Is not your soul nearer to you than your children? And it is the welfare of your soul that you consult in the distribution of your goods to the poor," Matt. xix. 21.

It is incredible that the christian professor, who is careless of the souls of his children, can be the subject of a proper anxiety for their real happiness; yet it is from such persons that we commonly hear this apology for seeking to heap up riches. Supposing that, in a degree, they are sincere in their professions, yet since their solicitude is confined to the interests of this world, it is clear that they must suppose the welfare of their children more intimately

involved in their being wealthy than in their being pious. And this is the essence of covetousness; the unequivocal indication of delight and trust in riches more than in the living God. No such allegation, therefore, can justify the efforts of these individuals for the accumulation of wealth; on the contrary, combined with their neglect of the spiritual interests of their families, it supplies a most available reason for their condemnation.

In fact, except it shall appear that, in some just degree, beneficence is proportioned to the increase of wealth, there is no plea for its accumulation which can be held of any weight. If, as is commonly believed, wealthy professors of religion do not contribute to the cause of God in, at least, the same proportion as the poor, the unavoidable conclusion is that one or other of these classes does wrong. If the latter only come up to the demands of duty, the others fall lamentably short of them; while if the rich do all that is required, the poor must be prodigal. One of these conclusions we must admit, nor will it for a moment be doubted which is correct; for no one will affirm that any portion of the church of Christ is too liberal.

“He that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?” 1 John iv. 20. By a parallel argument we prove, that where the accumulation of wealth interferes with the duties of beneficence, it is equally inconsistent with spirituality and heavenliness of affection. This is the laying up of “treasure upon earth,” which the words of Christ denounce. The glory of God is to be the object of every part of the christian’s life and labours; it is to be contemplated “whether we eat, or drink, or whatever we do.”

But all such hoarding of wealth, as is but too common in what is called the religious world, which evidently cannot be conducted with a direct reference to the Divine honour in ourselves and among mankind, is covetousness in act. In fact, in a large proportion of cases, it must be held to amount to avarice. Every failure, in proportionate beneficence, or the application of what ought to be devoted to God and his cause, to the purposes of pride or luxury, has the additional guilt of sacrilegious ingratitude. "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. Ye are cursed with a curse: for ye have robbed me, even this whole nation," Mal. iii. 8, 9.

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## CHAPTER V.

## THE ANTICHRISTIAN CHARACTER OF COVETOUSNESS.

SEVERAL of the views strictly belonging to the subject of this chapter, have necessarily been in some sort anticipated. It seems desirable, however, to treat of it in a more formal way, and somewhat more at large. Some additional aid may thus be afforded to a proper apprehension of the heinousness of the sin under consideration. There are two general views, of which this part of our dissertation is capable. The one respects christian morals; the other, truths which are more exclusively evangelical.

There is no sin against which the Divine denunciations are more positive or specific than covetousness. Hence, in attempting to form a judgment on its malignity, or to adjust its rank among offences against christian morals, we may cursorily avail ourselves of a variety of Scripture facts and statements.

This sin, then, is to be excluded from the christian ministry. "A bishop must not be greedy of filthy lucre, not covetous. Likewise must the deacons be not greedy of filthy lucre." A similar character was required in the judges of ancient Israel, 1 Tim. iii. 2, 3, 8; Tit. i. 7; Exod. xviii. 21.

He who sins in this sort is classed with the vilest and most abominable criminals. We cite one of

the catalogues, out of several, in which his designation occurs: "fornicators, idolaters, adulterers, effeminate, abusers of themselves with mankind, thieves, covetous, drunkards, revilers, extortioners," 1 Cor. vi. 9, 10. See also Mark vii. 21, 22; Rom. i. 29; 1 Cor. v. 10, 11; Eph. v. 3, 5; 2 Tim. iii. 2; 2 Pet. ii. 14.

Covetousness is represented as the source of every other sin. "The love of money is the root of all evil; which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows," 1 Tim. vi. 10.

Its very name is a thing accursed and forbidden. "But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints," Eph. v. 3.

Christians are prohibited from common association with the professor who is guilty of it; and in him it is recognised as much more heinous than in men of the world. "I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat," 1 Cor. v. 9—11.

Lastly: it is a sin especially abhorred by God; and it inevitably excludes from the kingdom of heaven. "This ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. Let no man deceive you with

vain words: for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. Be not ye therefore partakers with them," Psa. x. 3; Eph. v. 5—7; 1 Cor. vi. 9, 20.

Beyond the moral testimony of Scripture, we are furnished with means for judging of the heinousness of some sins, by the visitations of God, either actual or threatened, or by that everlasting infamy, to which certain offenders are consigned in sacred history. For these criteria, we are greatly indebted to the Old Testament; and as its sanctions were of a more sensible character than those of the gospel, so, in the temporal judgments recorded in that part of the Scriptures, we are led as directly to the Divine decisions upon moral subjects, as by the spiritual evils, threatened or inflicted, under the New Testament.

Covetousness was peculiarly marked by the tokens of the displeasure of God; and with the exception of idolaters, we have a larger list of offenders in this respect than in any other. There is Balaam, who "heard the words of God, and knew the knowledge of the Most High, and saw the vision of the Almighty," who blessed the tabernacles of Jacob, and longed for the death of the righteous, who was yet so besotted by the love of "the wages of unrighteousness," as to fall, "having his eyes open;" whose madness was rebuked by the most stupid of animals, and who ultimately was visited by the victorious sword of Israel, Num. xxii. 30; xxiv. 15; 2 Pet. ii. 15; Jude 11. There is Achan, the troubler of Israel, whose covetousness stayed the progress of a triumphant nation, and eventually consigned to destruction himself, his family, and all his possessions," Josh. vii; 1 Chron. ii. 7. There is

Gehazi, the witness of the miracles of his master Elisha, the spectator of his example, and the sharer of the blessings of his house ; who yet, for the love of money, could descend to the most despicable artifice to impose upon a grateful and generous stranger, and who thus gave himself and his posterity for ever, to the frightful disease of leprosy, 2 Kings v. 20—27. There is Jehoiakim, the sharer of the blood, and inheritor of the throne of the virtuous Josiah, whose greediness of gold led him to atrocious oppression, and who was at length slain by the sword of the Chaldeans, and “buried with the burial of an ass,” without honour and without lamentation, Jer. xxii. 13—19.

The New Testament is not without examples of a like monitory and instructive character : there is the traitor, the son of perdition, the protomartyr of covetousness, Judas. There is the unhappy pair, who, with falsehood on their lips, and the love of money in their hearts, were suddenly driven into eternity, Ananias and Sapphira. There is the renegade Demas, who, after having been blessed with the society and friendship of the apostle Paul, and associated with him in his honourable labours, did, for the “love of this present world,” abandon the venerable confessor in his bonds, Philem. 24 ; 2 Tim. iv. 10. The profligate heretics denounced by the apostle Peter, under the influence of the same principle, made merchandise of the souls of men ; and the first sins enumerated by St. Paul, as distinguishing the perilous times which he foretold, were the kindred vices of selfishness and covetousness,” 2 Pet. ii. 13, 14 ; 2 Tim. iii. 1, 2.

Although the New Testament does not supply an equal number with the Old, of eminent instances of

temporal judgment inflicted upon individual offenders, yet are its threatenings in perfect harmony with the spirit of the former and more obvious visitations. Hence, the test by which the eternal states of men are to be decided is the christian observance or the neglect of the duties of beneficence. The damning sin of the day of judgment,—He that hath ears to hear, let him hear,—that which will then stand out with a prominence more appalling than a burning universe, is COVETOUSNESS, considered as an indication of a want of love to Christ. “Then shall the King say unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me not in: naked, and ye clothed me not: sick, and in prison, and ye visited me not. Then shall they answer him, saying, Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, or athirst, or a stranger, or naked, or sick, or in prison, and did not minister unto thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me. And these shall go away into everlasting punishment,” Matt. xxv. 41—46. In accordance with the view thus supplied, St. Paul directs the preaching of Timothy; “Charge them that are rich in this world,—that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate; laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life,” 1 Tim. vi. 17—19.

But we are not left to infer the unlawfulness of covetousness from any indirect representations, how-

ever clear. It is prohibited in the most absolute terms. "Thou shalt not covet any thing that is thy neighbour's," is as plain and as incapable of evasion as "Thou shalt do no murder."

It may, however, be questioned how far the evil under consideration comes within this statute, since it rather refers to wealth in general, than to any specific good possessed by another. This is so common a refuge from the force of the prohibition as to merit some notice. The desire of riches may be considered as unlawful, either in respect to its object or its degree. In the one case it is determined to be covetousness, because that which we desire is possessed by our neighbours; in the other, because our desire is immoderate. The former is a literal and obvious breach of the law; but the latter, which has been more particularly considered in these pages, is not less a transgression of its spirit. However they may be distinguished in the abstract, they are rarely, if ever, dissociated in fact. This is clear in all cases where the prosperity of another is the occasion of uneasy emotion; and if there are covetous men who are not subjects of this sort of dissatisfaction, it is only because they are not without hope that they themselves may attain similar advantages. But were they to be cut off from all possibility of enriching themselves by the ordinary modes of exertion and enterprise, there is no doubt but that the successes of others would disquiet them, and that so far they would be transgressors of the literal commandment.

So, when a particular article possessed by one of our neighbours—say an elegant mansion, a splendid equipage, or even a handsome piece of furniture, or a costly dress—excites in our minds a dissatisfac-

tion which cannot be allayed except by the lapse of time, or by our becoming possessors of something similar, the prohibition of the law is literally violated. He who has never fallen in with that particular species of property, by which his inordinate desire might receive a definite direction, may be a stranger to this emotion. But let there be presented to a covetous person some object which seems specially desirable, which yet he is unable to procure, and respecting which there is little hope that his condition will ever warrant his possessing it, and the result will be, that he will become a transgressor of the very letter of the law. As, therefore, the form assumed by this sin is a mere matter of accident, the question of its morality must remain unaffected by the variety of aspect of which it is capable. Let the reader turn to the seventh chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and he will find that the apostle Paul recognised all inordinate desire as included in the prohibition before us.\*

“Whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet

\* “I had not known sin, but by the law; for I had not known lust, (*ἐπιθυμίαν*, concupiscence, evil desire,) except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet, (*οὐκ ἐπιθυμήσεις*; so the LXX., Exod. xx. 17.) But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence,” (*πᾶσαν ἐπιθυμίαν*, every lust or evil desire,) Rom. vii. 7, 8.

The word *ἐπιθυμία* employed in this place, and the word *πλεονεξία* commonly rendered *covetousness* by our translators, appear to have been used by the writers of the New Testament with this difference. The one, when used in a bad sense, signifies irregular desire in general; the other, the desire of aggrandizement. The evil of the one seems to be in the intensity of the emotion; that of the other, in the quantity desired. The sinner, in the one case, desires too earnestly; in the other, he desires too much. Practically, however, they are always united.

offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill," Jam. ii 10, 11. The violation of the law is an outrage upon the Divine authority. God is the Being wronged by sin in every form or degree, and it is this fact which gives our offences against Scripture morality their peculiar and transcendent heinousness. Whether our disobedience be in what men esteem a small or a great matter, the turpitude of the act is unchanged. The degrees of punishment may, and undoubtedly will vary, but the fact of condemnation in all instances will be the same, and is as certain in what is commonly regarded as a venial transgression, as in what is universally admitted to be inexcusable and detestable.

But the prohibition before us is one of great comprehension and breadth. For if there be one breach of the decalogue which practically leads to all others, it is covetousness. In all its forms it offends against the two first commandments. It is idolatry, and its subject is an idolater; that is the testimony of Scripture, Col. iii. 5, Eph. v. 5, and is capable of the most satisfactory proof; for what is idolatry, but rendering to the creature the homage due to God alone? It is the highest idolatry, because that of the heart. It is carried on in the temple of God, that temple in which, beyond all that this world can supply, he delights to be worshipped, the human spirit, the inmost sanctuary of man's affections. Here is set up the shrine of the rival of God; hither the powers of the soul resort to pay their adoration; and from this centre extends the debasing influence over all the apprehensions of the mind, and all the energies and labours of the life.

There is, in this species of idolatry, a peculiar baseness. We find something redeeming in the undue reverence for intellect or poetry, for heroism or friendship, for eloquence or patriotism; but the yielding the homage of our best affections to things so base as gold and silver, the adoration of money and of lands, the preferring bonds and securities to God and heaven, the making the barn or shop our sanctuary, the ledger our Bible, and the strong box the ark of our covenant, is an extreme of degradation beyond which the tide of human corruption does not seem capable of bearing us. For pride and malice, and for all the intenser forms of the malignant passions, men have their type in the devil; and in the sins of sensuality they may occasionally have their rivals in the brute; but the sordid idolatry of covetousness is man's own sin. Its guilt and infamy belong to him alone; unless, indeed, the dream of the poet be true, that among the basest of the apostate spirits the covetous man may find his patron and his exemplar,—

“Mammon, the least erected Spirit that fell  
From heaven; for e'en in heaven his look and  
thoughts  
Were always downward bent, admiring more  
The riches of heaven's pavement, trodden gold,  
Than aught divine or holy, else enjoyed  
In vision beatific.”

Nor are the two first commandments singular in the despite put upon them by this sin. It is truly and demonstrably “the root of all evil.” The dishonour of the Divine name and claims, the profanation of the day of God, the disruption of the ties of consanguinity, murder, uncleanness, theft, perjury, in all their varieties, are its ordinary and

acknowledged offspring. Even in its more subtle and less commonly recognised forms, we may detect the same rampant and unsparing antinomianism. Let us take, for example, what we have elsewhere termed the extravagance of covetousness, the profusion of expenditure in state, and luxury, and apparel, which is resorted to in order to gain the reputation of wealth; and though this may be deemed of but remote affinity to the more glaring forms of covetousness, yet we find, even here, the like comprehensiveness of evil. Inasmuch as it goes to the encouragement of pride and vainglory, it is inconsistent with that reverent acknowledgment of the Divine honour which is required in the third commandment. The desecration of the hours of the sabbath to the purposes of personal adornment is an evil of very common occurrence. So is also the rebellion of children against parental restraint in the matter of dress and vain expense. The piques and resentments, which commonly attend rivalries in this particular, are, according to our Lord's interpretation, Matt. v. 21, 22, violations of the sixth commandment. How far costly attire is from ministering to purity of heart is too well known to require any detailed illustration. Let the reader refer to the Spartan law, cited above, as a heathen recognition of this truth. The injustice and frauds which are associated with extravagant expenditure, and the wrongs thus inflicted upon the industrious and deserving tradesman and artisan, are also matters of unhappy notoriety. And lastly, the ninth commandment requires the absence of all guile, all attempt at deception, consequently all effort to make our own condition appear what it is not, and thus to convey an idea of the inferiority of

our neighbour's wealth and resources. But this unhallowed and extravagant expenditure is a plain offence against the christian simplicity and guilelessness thus demanded, since its direct object is to place us in a rank of society to which we are not entitled by our real circumstances. Thus does the most cursory survey of the subject lead to the unavoidable conclusion that there is no commandment of the decalogue against which, in a variety of ways, covetousness does not offend.

In its most flagrant and portentous forms, the power of human law is put forth to crush or restrain it. But let no man flatter himself that because he does not come under the penalty of that law, nor expose himself to the infamy which the usages of society affix to certain overt and extreme acts of covetousness, that therefore his criminality is of trifling amount. There is no difficulty in recognising the sin which brings the burglar to his sentence and punishment, as, in its principle, identical with that of him who hoards his wealth while the poor are starving, and souls, immortal and priceless souls, are perishing through his avarice.

In the present state, our perceptions are beguiled by the maxims of worldly policy, or distracted by the glitter of worldly reputation. But the day of true apprehension and true arrangement is rapidly hastening towards us, and it is to the decisions of that day, so far as we can anticipate them, that we must refer for a correct estimate of the comparative heinousness of our several sins. It is among its highest solemnities, and one which will probably have the most startling effect, that then every act will assume not only its true character, but its true order likewise. Remote as they appear in this life,

the needy swindler and the avaricious professor of Christ's beneficent religion will stand together. And yet there will be a marked distinction between the judgment of the two. The one, with some show of reason, may say, "Lord, when saw I thee an hungred, and fed thee not?" for he has been beyond the sphere of any such demands upon his beneficence. But the other must be speechless. He has known and admitted the claims of Christ; in profession, he has consecrated himself to the service of Christ; he has shared many of the benefits of church membership; he has heard the demands of a perishing world, but he has either wholly shut up his bowels of compassion against them, or he has doled out a niggard ransom of his reputation among men; he has heard the cry of Christ in his poor and afflicted people, but the most scanty drops of God's bounty have been hardly squeezed from his frozen parsimony. Multitudes have perished in their iniquity, to whom, by his munificence, he might have conveyed the offers of salvation. Beyond his personal guilt, deadly and terrible as is its amount, the blood of souls is found in his skirts; and nothing remains but that, as in the world he cherished the spirit, so he should now share the doom of Cain,—the brand, the infamy, the lasting execration.

Such reflections give peculiar force to some of those views which are especially subjects of evangelical revelation, and to which it will now be our business more particularly to advert. Every possessor of property is a steward; but unfaithfulness to his trust is essential to the very nature of covetousness. For since a due sense of our responsibility never fails to moderate and restrain our desires for

wealth, the existence of inordinate affection of itself proves us unprepared to admit such responsibility. And this, in some respects, is a greater sin than the mere misapplication of our Lord's money. In a human steward, we should regard with much less severity an act of unfaithfulness in the disposal of the property intrusted to him, than the persevering and habitual refusal to acknowledge the rights of the proprietor.

It will be perceived that the idea of stewardship wholly changes the nature of wealth; and much that might be purely unobjectionable, supposing we were its absolute proprietors, becomes criminal upon the contrary view. A man may do what he will with his own, and so long as he confines himself to the uses of it which are not of themselves sinful, he is not rationally the subject of blame. But when the property we hold belongs to another, he, and not we, must decide on its distribution, and every act of independent use outrages his right and authority. The mere consulting our own will, instead of his directions, is a crime, and even that which we may happen to do in accordance with them is altogether vitiated by the injustice in principle of which we are guilty.

This is peculiarly true of a divine stewardship, since God reads the heart, and it is the concurrence of that in our acts, which, in his esteem, determines their moral character. So that if the professor of religion does what God ordains, if he do it merely of his own pleasure, and regard it as an optional matter to do or to leave undone, his heart is a rebel against the Divine authority; and the act (in itself indifferent, or, if springing from religious principle, truly virtuous) partakes of the nature of sin.

Such is every disposal of wealth by the covetous man. The motive is sinful: the conduct, considered of itself, may not be so; but while the heart is in this posture of resistance to the claims and rights of God, the practice, in that particular respect, can have but one character.

But this disclaimer of the absolute Divine authority never goes alone. It is invariably associated with the misuse of the property with which we are intrusted. For admitting the possessor of riches to be on the whole a well-meaning and benevolent person, still, if he regard the exercise of beneficence as a matter purely determinable by his own will, he is altogether unlikely to act at variance with its decisions. Where the demand upon his property is agreeable, he will yield to it; but, in other cases, though the obligation may be quite as binding, or even more so, there is no probability that he will cross and coerce his own inclinations.

Yet is this not the less essential to true christianity. The temper of the evangelic scheme throughout is that of self-sacrifice. From the love in which originated the marvellous plan of human redemption, through all the agents by whom it was brought out in its proper impressions and efficiency, down to the lowest sharer in its benefits, the same spirit is more or less to be perceived. The gift of Christ was the sacrifice of the Father. "He spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," Rom. viii. 32. Our blessed Redeemer, "who being in the form of God, thought it no robbery to be equal with God," yet emptied himself, "made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of man." Having endured the calamities

of our nature, without claiming any immunity on account of his original and inherent dignity, he eventually "GAVE himself a ransom for all," becoming "obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," Phil. ii. 6—8, 1 Tim. ii. 6. The same temper was strikingly conspicuous in the first teachers of our holy religion. For them, no loss was so oppressive, no sacrifice so great, as to make them falter in their heroic enterprise. Reputation, and ease, and property, and the blessings of social life, and even life itself, they calmly and joyfully resigned. Their prejudices, their own wills, their inveterate habits, with all that commonly binds men to other modes of conduct, were studiously coerced; and having "suffered the loss of all things," they counted their sacrifices of no worth, so that they "might win Christ," and "know him and the power of his resurrection." And although this is not the age of apostolic heroism, yet even now the more eminent servants of Christ partake largely of the same spirit. Nay, that, in a greater or less degree, it is essential to christianity, is plainly testified in the word of God. The taking up the cross, the denying one's self, the being crucified to the world, are indispensable to the enjoyment of true religion in every age, Matt. x. 38, xvi. 24, 25: Luke xiv. 27: Gal. vi. 14.

This will, of course, be universally allowed in respect to our individual salvation. Wherever the grace of God has effectually appeared, it has taught the denial of "ungodliness and worldly lusts," Tit. ii. 11, 12, and if this has not been its effect upon our characters, we have hitherto received it in vain. Self-renunciation is a necessary preparative to our acceptance of the atonement of Christ, and he who

does not thus cross and subjugate his native self-dependance, and come in utter destitution to the provisions of the gospel, cannot participate in their healing and restoring benefits. But we must not pause here, or our views will be very far short of the truth. In the sacrifices of our Lord and of his apostles, it was not their own salvation nor their own profit that was contemplated, 1 Cor. x. 33. For the sake of others, they submitted to all privations, and for the accomplishment of the greatest and most comprehensive scheme of benevolence. The beneficence of the gospel, in harmony with the entire scheme of redeeming mercy, partakes essentially of a sacrificial and vicarious character: and though men may distribute of their property for the relief of others, without reference to evangelical principles, yet until they arrive at this standard and spirit, their beneficence cannot be properly evangelical.

The relief of indigence, and the effort to assuage sorrow, merely for the removal of those uneasy emotions with which the consciousness of misery fills us, is making the action terminate in ourselves. But the love of our Saviour induced him to become the sharer of the suffering which he sought to allay, and to submit to personal endurance even beyond that of the objects of his solicitude. In all things he had the pre-eminence. He was supreme in grief as in love, and thus could he invite attention to his agony; "All ye that pass by, behold and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow."

The christian, who has a deep sense of the miserable condition of mankind, catches something of the same spirit. He feels oppressed by the calamities of others, and the secret tears which he sheds

before God, attest how sincere and how intense are his emotions of evangelic sympathy. To such an one, the sacrifices of property become natural and easy. He is not satisfied unless, by personal inconvenience, he feels a portion of those evils which he longs to mitigate or remove. While there is in the world such a mass of misery, his conscience would trouble him if he lived in the fulness of sensual and selfish indulgence ; and, like the patriotic Nehemiah, he would fast and be sad, even in a royal palace, and at royal banquetings, for the laying waste of the city of the Lord. In a greater or less degree, this is the experience of every partaker of the real spirit of evangelic benevolence ; and if its examples be few, their paucity is to be referred either to a want of a correct estimate of the nature of the gospel, or to a prevalent falling short of its requisitions. The existence in the heart of an undue affection for wealth will readily account for the absence both of perception and approbation of the truth ; and in the rareness of this self-sacrificing benevolence, we have an indication of the lamentable extent to which covetousness prevails among the professors of christianity.

These views are illustrated in several Scripture facts. Although the desire of posthumous fame is one of the vainest of human vanities, yet there is hardly any price at which a christian would not be justified in seeking to attain that moral influence which will be exerted upon the remotest posterity, by the history of the beneficent widow and her two mites, Mark xii. 41—44. In this narration, it is to be noted that our Lord does not impugn the motives of the rich benefactors to the treasury ; and, for aught we know to the contrary, they were as

pure as that of the widow. Still less does he censure the measure of their liberality. On the contrary, the evangelist expressly states that they "gave much." But it was "of their abundance," the mere superfluities of their possessions, the absence of which would entail upon them no privation or inconvenience. On the other hand, the gift of the widow was "all she had, all her living," that which she could not part with except at the cost of personal discomfort, perhaps, even the want of food for herself and her children. It was an illustrious example of the spirit of sacrifice, and it is its sacrificial character which gives it its peculiar interest and impressiveness. It is therefore put on record, accompanied by the eulogy of the Redeemer, to be, through all ages, quoted, admired, and emulated in the church.

In the same spirit, the benevolence of the Macedonian churches is commended by St. Paul at once for its spontaneousness and its abundance, 2 Cor. viii. 1—5. They were "willing of themselves," (*αὐθαίρετοι*); they did not require strong persuasion. On the contrary, they urged upon their ministers the acceptance of their offerings to the cause of God, "praying them with much entreaty, that they would receive the gift." But the apostle specially testifies, making it matter of emphasis, not only that their benevolence was equal to their ability, but even beyond it. They did more than could have been expected from persons in their indigent circumstances, more than a spirit of ordinary liberality would have deemed either requisite or justifiable. And this their sacrificial temper was so fully in harmony with true christianity, that they are set forth as models for the Achaian christians,

and as evidences of the power of Divine grace to all succeeding believers.

In some cases, indeed, sacrificial beneficence is essential to salvation. This is plain from the history of the young wealthy ruler who, with a strong and sincere desire "to inherit eternal life," sought the instructions of our Lord, Mark x. 17—22. He was a person of irreproachable morals, and of a character so generally estimable, that "Jesus beholding him, loved him." But he was covetous. "He had great possessions," and he prized them irreligiously. It was necessary that they should be sacrificed, but this was a price at which he could not consent to become the disciple of Christ. There were other wealthy persons attached to our Lord from whom no such sacrifice was required. The reason of it in this case, therefore, we may rationally conclude, was the inordinate worldly affection, which the Redeemer knew would admit of no cure, except by the actual renunciation of wealth. The necessity for the sacrifice, and the aversion from it, had the same cause. Now although it is not alleged that a similar amount of sacrifice is now demanded, yet it must be maintained that the spirit required of this individual is necessary to scriptural christianity. He is altogether unworthy of discipleship who is not willing to follow Christ at any cost. But there are peculiar cases in which, unless this spirit be carried out into very efficient operation, the love of the world will attain such an ascendancy as to render salvation impossible. This necessity is most evident where there exists the greatest reluctance to allow it. To him, beyond all others, who is most unwilling to cultivate and to act under the influence of the temper in question, it is essential

that he should thwart and subjugate his own inclinations. Indeed, as the process of salvation is throughout corrective and restorative, the same rule obtains in all cases of evangelic duty. When, for example, we have the strongest indisposition for prayer, there is the most urgent reason to betake ourselves to the throne of grace; and if a christian will only pray at such times as he feels the exercise agreeable, it is certain that his salvation will be placed in great jeopardy. So in respect to the sacrificial beneficence which the gospel requires, he to whom it is peculiarly irksome can only neglect it at the imminent risk, if not the certain loss, of his soul.

Even in its mitigated forms, covetousness is essentially hostile to the spirit which we have endeavoured to describe. A person who unduly desires or prizes wealth may not be without a degree of beneficence. He may be considered as exemplary in this respect. He may even make sacrifices for the benefit of others, but the spirit of sacrifice is partial in its operations. He gives up what he least values, but leaves the more congenial indulgences altogether unrestricted. Where the proper evangelic temper prevails, the dearest enjoyment will come in for its share of limitation and diminution. An individual under its influence will not allow himself the luxurious use of the pleasures of the table, under the impression that the absence of state and ostentation is sufficient to meet the demands of duty; nor, on the other hand, strive to justify the splendour of his establishment and equipage by the temperance of his personal habits. He will be a consistent man, and there will be the utmost harmony throughout his conduct. He will

present his body with all its senses, and all its demands and delights, "a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God." Still, where the spirit of sacrifice exists, even in partial operation, a material point is gained. It only remains that its possessors should fully carry out the principle, and not only shall multitudes rise up and call them blessed, but they themselves shall arise from the low condition of christian character, which too commonly prevails, and shall, in an eminent degree, become illustriously shining, because intensely burning lights.

But the christianity of the professor who fully exhibits the influence of covetousness, and the number of such is unhappily very considerable, is one which can exist altogether without this species of self-denial. It can live in the dark and pestilent atmosphere of confirmed selfishness. A man of this class knows little of the fellowship of Christ in general, and nothing of the fellowship of his voluntary and vicarious sufferings. He is the self-indulging disciple of a self-denying Master. He professes to love and to rely for salvation upon the gospel, the very essence of which is sacrificial. But he has no altar on which he immolates his darling lust. He has no share in those sacerdotal acts of which the cross of Christ was the symbol, and the sorrow and love of him who bled thereon the prototype. His beneficence, if indeed he is at all beneficent, is like the sacrifice of Cain, of the fruit of the ground, sordidly reared and sordidly given, but given without the shedding of blood, without the mortal pang, and the rending asunder of the flesh and the spirit.

Not only does the gospel supply the example and illustrations of self-sacrifice, but equally the obligation to it. Those very acts, which, in this respect,

make Christ our pattern, are so transcendent in their benevolence as to bind us to their invitation. The justice of the Divine claims upon our devotedness would be sufficiently manifest were they only made to rest upon the natural relation of the Creator and his creatures. That he has made us is a sufficient reason for the consecration to him of ourselves and our services. That he is the source of all our property is adequate ground for the demand of its entire sanctification to his glory. But the special emphasis of evangelical ethics is, "Ye are bought with a price." The Redeemer has the right, arising from purchase; therefore, "ye are not your own," 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20, and to regard ourselves as such is the grossest injustice. Yet, even this, as the less effective mode of appeal to the human heart, is more rarely asserted than the obligation which arises from ineffable and infinite love. Thus tenderly does God reproach his ancient people,—“What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? Have I been a wilderness unto Israel? a land of darkness? wherefore, then, say my people, We are lords; we will come no more unto thee?” Isaiah v. 4; Jer. ii. 31. But to us who live in the full developement of the love of a redeeming God, how yet more affectingly does this subject present itself! He loved us even to the death, and that when we had no thought of, nor care for him. There was no division of his beneficence, no reservation of his powers, no retention of his immunities. “Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye, through his poverty, might be rich. He took not on him the nature of angels, but he took on him the seed of Abraham.” In

“the Man of sorrows, dwelt the fulness of the Godhead bodily. The eternal Word became flesh, and tabernacled among us.” The “likeness of man” is not lowly enough for the Creator of angels: lo! he takes “the form of a servant. The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to give his life a ransom for many.” And in the very consecration which this condescension demands, the design is still of the same character: it is that we may fulfil the purposes of his beneficence, and become spirits as pure and joyous as his unspeakable love would have us to be. The man endowed with spiritual perception apprehends at once the force of such a claim—“We love him because he first loved us;” and dark, indeed, must be that mind, and cold those affections, and indurated that heart, which can resist “the blood of sprinkling, speaking better things than that of Abel,”—

“O! my bleeding, loving Lord,  
Thou breakest my heart of stone.”

But covetousness obscures our perceptions of this obligation as really as it does our sense of the sacrificial character of the gospel in which it originates. He who does not apprehend christianity as sacrificial throughout, will not duly feel the force of the demand which the sacrifice of Christ makes upon him. He who refuses to consecrate his property, it is clear has not unreservedly consecrated himself. But the love of Christ is not of that poor, limited, equivocal character, which will allow of reservation and compromise. It is too ample and too tender to be the foundation of any claims but those to entire and perfect devotedness. It is the basest ingratitude to attempt to deprive our Saviour of his right in us, and in all that we possess, or to divide

between him and the world those hearts which his blood was shed to purchase. Nothing has been withheld from us which God has to bestow; and shall it be that we desire to withhold from him any portion of those insignificant returns which he so graciously condescends to ask? Shall we strive to diminish our impressions of his tenderness, that we may the more securely withdraw ourselves from the force of his claims? In no aspect does covetousness appear a sin so truly detestable, as when put in opposition to the dying love of our Saviour, and yet to that love it is always hostile. Except so far as it may be able to save him from hell, he, who is under the power of this vice, would blot the cross from existence. As long as any measure of moral sensibility remains, that record, into "which angels desire to look," excites disquietude in his spirit; and could he define any other mode of personal salvation, he would erase from the book of God the testimony of that ardent beneficence in the Redeemer, which shames and tortures his own desperate and determined selfishness and ingratitude. This is the more inexcusable, since, by a profession of christianity, he testifies to all the world his admission of the force of the claims of Christ, while yet, in his heart and in his life, those claims are resisted and despised. He is, indeed, the beau ideal of a modern Judas. By his connexion with the church, he gives the "Hail, Master!" and the kiss, while yet the glitter of the sacrilegious silver plays before his eyes with irresistible attraction. Nay, he heightens and refines upon the treachery of his exemplar. The ancient Judas, when he saw that his Master was condemned, was smitten with a remorse so deep and incurable, that

even the wretched bribe lost its fascination. But his successor has seen not the condemnation only, but the death of the Lord, and the splendid development of his love, in the mediatorial work. He knows that all the tenderness in the heart of the Redeemer is bent upon his happiness. He hears from sabbath to sabbath the testimony of a living ministry, and feels in his heart the strivings of the Holy Spirit. But in spite of all, he holds the precious lie in his right hand, and hugs to his bosom the darling sin which gave his Master to the torment of the cross.

The hardihood of this treachery is one of its, not least, remarkable features. Had the commercial agent wronged his employer in but the one-thousandth degree, with what anxiety and terror would he look forward to the day of reckoning! But "the children of this world are wiser in their generation than the" multitudes who call themselves "children of light." Remark how every consideration serves to aggravate the peril of the avaricious professor. His injustice and treason have been committed, not against man, but against his Maker; the examination of his accounts is to take place, not on an ordinary day of settling, but in the day of judgment; the exposure is to be made, not to a few individuals, and then forgotten, but to the universe; and its results, its deadly shame, its horror, and dismay, are to endure for ever. Were the contrary the fact, the covetous man would be afraid; but his apprehension is exactly in an inverse ratio to the force of the reasons for fear; the greatness of the Being whom he has wronged, the terror of the day of retribution, and the certain and irrecoverable ruin into which a perseverance in his present course will

plunge him. Wiser? Yes, the children of this world are indeed wiser; yet this is but small praise: for surely no folly can be so outrageous, no madness so extravagant and pitiable as that of the man, who, in the fullest degree, admits all these facts, and yet remains insensible to their practical bearing.

Such recklessness is a phenomenon which might surprise us, if it were more rare, and perplex us, were we not acquainted, in some degree, with the nature and force of the principle in which it originates, unbelief. The gospel is a dispensation of truth, which, however clear in itself, is yet adapted to our condition, as the subjects of probation. It therefore demands, on our part, a preference of remote and unseen good to that which is at hand and observable. The principle of this preference is faith, the faculty of spiritual perception, or as, in its operation, it is described by St. Paul, "the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen," Heb. xi. 1. In other words, it is practical credence; the apprehension of Divine truth in such a degree, and with such gracious emotions, as shall lead to a correspondent course of conduct. This view is illustrated by its effects, as recorded in the eleventh chapter of the Epistle to the Hebrews. To take the case of Moses as an example,—“By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward,” verse 24—26. The character of our great Exemplar presents the same principle with equal prominence; “—who, for the joy

that was set before him, endured the cross, despising the shame," Heb. xii. 2. The christian, then, is one who assumes that the testimony of God, respecting spiritual good, is as worthy of his confidence as are the results of his own observation and experience of temporal blessings. Upon this he acts; and the more fully he carries out this, the originating principle of his christianity, the more scriptural is his character, and the more elevated are his attainments.

The mind of man is so constituted that it can admit, at one time, of but one object of engrossing interest and affection, one master passion, which, like the rod of Moses, swallows up all the others. In the case of the consistent christian, this object is spiritual good. With the desire for its attainment, his mind is fully occupied. There is, so to speak, no room for the prevalency of other affections. Thus, in the nature of things, must it be. Where there is a due perception of the immense value of the provisions of God's mercy for the happiness of his faithful people, every emotion and every affection which refers to other blessings will be in a state of subjection and of comparative feebleness. This is the necessary result of a full and unqualified admission of the Divine testimony, confirmed, as it is, by personal experience. It will be plain, therefore, that where there is a strong appetite for riches there cannot be strong faith. If the mind is held in a state of equipoise, and especially if there is an occasional preponderance in favour of sensible good, there certainly can be no suitable apprehension of those glories which "eye hath not seen," ear hath not heard, which heart hath not conceived.

This form of unbelief is an evil of fearful magnitude. The God of truth has supplied us in the

Scriptures with ample statements, in every variety of attractive form, to allure our affections to spiritual blessings. Their importance and value are illustrated by the fact that they could be procured for us at no price less than the blood of the Son of God. All the ministries of Providence, and all the labours of evangelists, and all the strivings of the Spirit are combined and directed to withdraw us from whatever might interfere with their enjoyment. If the expression may be allowed, God has set his heart upon convincing men, of what, in itself, is a most obvious truth—That the best blessings which he has to bestow are worthy of all our desire and effort; and there is nothing, consistent with a state of trial, which he has not done to enforce this sentiment on our understandings and our hearts. Unbelief is always a heinous sin, because it is, as St. John expresses it, the making “God a liar,” 1 John v. 10. But the infidelity of covetousness transcends ordinary malignity, since it is the rejection of the Divine testimony upon that point where it is most copious and explicit. There is, in fact, no part of evangelical truth which is not dishonoured by the covetous man. His is a comprehensive and sweeping despite to the whole gospel, a sin which spares no declaration or doctrine of God’s word. It puts its brand of reprobation upon every Divine asseveration, however frequently and however solemnly repeated. He who is under its influence does what he can to render infamous the blood of the only begotten Son of God, declaring in effect, and by his practice, the comparative worthlessness of the blessings which it was shed to purchase. The testimony of his life is to the effect that the frequent and affecting declarations of the Redeemer’s

love, the perpetual strivings of the Spirit, and the urgent persuasions of a gospel ministry, are all designed to beguile him into a grievous injustice to himself, by the sacrifice of good far more estimable than any which is thus presented to him. If he be right, the entire gospel is the merest cheat and mockery, a low and pitiable attempt upon human credulity. Its Author is a malevolent being, all whose efforts are directed to defraud men of their best and dearest enjoyments. The frightful images of cruelty, with which the demonology of heathenism is crowded, are gentle and amiable compared with the shocking picture traced by this sort of infidelity of Him whose name is love.

But to be more particular : an elementary truth of christianity is the absence of all worthiness in man ; and in its due appreciation is to be found one of the earliest indications of the effectual working of the Holy Spirit. When the mind is thus properly impressed, the smallest blessing will be hailed as an evidence of the amplitude of the Divine liberality. The most eminent christians wonder not that God gives so little, but so much ; or rather, in the recollection of their own sinfulness, that he gives anything but the undying worm and the quenchless fire. The discontent of covetousness, therefore, is a practical rejection of the testimony of Scripture on the subject of human depravity and guilt. It does equal dishonour to the absolute right of God in all that we possess ; for where this is admitted, there will be a ready acquiescence in every Divine arrangement. The writer is here reminded of an acquaintance of his childhood, a venerable and saintly woman in humble circumstances, whose christian character was so remarkable as to leave an indelible

impression upon his mind. On one occasion, when her house had been violently entered during the night, and a considerable quantity of property stolen, he well recollects the spirit and sentiment with which she met her heavy loss. "It all belonged to the Lord," she said, "and if he permitted them to take what was his, it is not for me to complain." It is hardly necessary to add that the mind which could then realize such a view, was beyond the power of human vicissitudes to disturb or ruffle.

The unbelief of covetousness is a practical reversing of the arguments of the Bible to secure our confidence in God's fidelity and care. If the christian professor, who is under its power, considers the lilies of the field and the fowls of the heavens, and observes the beauty with which the Creator has clothed the one, and the bountiful provision which he makes for the other, it is not with the conclusion to which our Lord directs us, Matt. vi. 26—34. On the contrary, he resolves to make the enriching of himself and his family the subject of his first and most anxious concern, even at the expense of the Divine law. Life, he admits, is the gift of God, but for its continuance, his Maker is not to be trusted, Luke xii. 22, 23. He deems it discreet to confide in his own assiduity and prudence for temporal blessings rather than in Him who "spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all," Rom. viii. 32. He knows the promise, "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee," Heb. xiii. 5; but he determines to accumulate all he can, and thus to provide against unfaithfulness or vacillation in Him, whose "promises are all yea and amen," and whose nature is "the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever." There is not, in short,

one Scripture truth of this order, which he does not practically contradict; and could he succeed in persuading himself that there is no God, it is difficult to perceive how his conduct could be materially different.

But this infidelity is confined to no class of Divine truths. The Bible teaches us that riches flow from the bounty of God, and that, in his wisdom and love, he will grant to each of his people that measure which shall conduce to his real advantage, and that, be he rich or poor, "a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth," Luke xii. 15. But the doctrine of the covetous man, as practically expressed, is that no amount of wealth can be other than a benefit, and his whole conduct is founded upon the assumption that without abundance, life is little to be prized either for security or happiness.

In respect to sensible good, the Scriptures make a broad distinction between the state of the christian and that of the unregenerate man: they unequivocally state the incompatibility of the characteristics of each in the same individual; and there is, in these representations, an air of rationality and conclusiveness which at once commends them to every reflective mind. What, for example, can be more congruous with all our natural ideas of truth, than the declaration of our Lord; "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon?" Matt. vi. 24. What can be more obviously apposite and sound than the kindred sentiment of the apostle John, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the

world, the love of the Father is not in him?" 1 John ii. 15. The antinomian infidelity of covetousness is altogether at variance with these rational and salutary maxims. In its system of ethics, there is no incongruity between the love of the world and the love of the Father. Its votaries have no hesitation in acting on the principle that the service of two masters is not only possible, but in the highest degree judicious, and that, in fact, apart from this assumption, no man can do his duty to society.

A strong sense of the evil of covetousness would without doubt go far towards its correction. But it is the policy of those with whom it is a darling sin, to render faint and indistinct the line of demarcation which, in this respect, separates the church and the world, and to shade off, as far as may be, the contrast between the two. It will not be questioned that these efforts have been too successful; for between a large proportion of professors and men of reputation who make pretensions to religion, there is little or no practical difference. The maxims of each are the same; there is the same spirit of aggrandizement, the same craving after wealth, the same disposition towards, and justification of its accumulation. Of each it may be said, that God is not in their thoughts, that their hearts are atheistical; and hence, under the pressure of disappointment and calamity, there is, in unsubdued spirits, the same restlessness and discontentment, the same rebellious rising against the awards of Providence, or, where the mind is easily prostrated, the same depression and despondency. In short, it would puzzle the most acute observer, supposing he were required to form a judgment upon two individuals of these diverse pretensions, to say

which was the man of the world, and which its professed renouncer.

“He that layeth up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God,” in the Divine regard, is “a fool,” Luke xii. 20, 21. But “the wicked blesseth the covetous, whom the Lord abhorreth,” Psa. x. 3.

And wherein does this differ from the estimate of the worldly-minded professor? Who, in his judgment, are the men whose situations are justly to be desired, but those of successful speculators, the traders who hasten to be rich, the merchants who, like those of Tyre, are princes in their accumulation of wealth? Let him deal faithfully with his own heart, and he will without difficulty perceive the complacency with which he regards such persons and their acquisitions. But this, alas! is not in harmony with the estimation of God, of Christ, of holy and happy ministering spirits. How vain and illusory will it appear when the marts and palaces of Babylon shall fall down into the waters of oblivion, and the wide and wild wailing of her merchants and her mariners shall swell up to heaven!

## CHAPTER VI.

## COVETOUSNESS PREJUDICIAL TO PERSONAL PIETY.

CHRISTIANITY is designed to remove the mass of moral evil by which men are afflicted, and to elevate them to a state of purity and love. And when the grand process of spiritual restoration shall have been accomplished, then shall the curse be done away; there shall be no more night; tears shall be wiped from all faces, and death shall be swallowed up in victory, Rev. xxii. 3, 5; xxi. 4; 1 Cor. xv. 54.

Individual renovation is described in Scripture by a variety of terms, each of which is intended to teach us some peculiarity, either in the process itself, or in the spiritual condition into which it introduces its subjects. Of these, adoption and regeneration are some of the most interesting and significant. Thus are we brought into the singularly honourable and happy relation of children to God, are made "partakers of the Divine nature, heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ," 2 Pet. i. 4; Rom. viii. 17.

Sin, in all its forms, is opposed to the Divine character, and consequently is the great obstacle to this process of restoration. But there are some sins, the opposition of which is peculiarly strong and

efficient. Of these, covetousness is one of the most remarkable. And this will not be matter of surprise if we consider its comprehensiveness, and the great number of evils which it necessarily includes. But the peculiarity, to which it is desirable that the attention of the reader should be particularly directed, is the appropriateness of the opposition which this sin offers to the designs of God's mercy. It is specifically opposed to that aspect of the Divine character which supplies the model for the new creation. It dishonours God in his justice, in his holiness, in his truth, in his absolute royalty; but its greatest dishonour is to his benevolence. Against that most impressively developed of the Divine attributes its hostility is constant, unchanging, indomitable; and it is as possible for the Self-Existent to cease, as for covetousness, in every form, to be other than a deadly foe to his tenderness and love.

If we contemplate the scriptural representations of spiritual renovation, and particularly of the filiation of the believer, we cannot fail to remark the prominence given to the love of God, both to us and in us. Thus—"Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God!—We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren—Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God; for God is love—If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us," 1 John iii. 1, 14; iv. 7, 8, 12.

So when our Lord, in his sermon on the mount, would call forth the aspirations of his auditors to a

state of spiritual sonship, he adduces the beneficence of God as the peculiar feature of his character, by a resemblance to which such a relationship is to be distinguished. "I say unto you, Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust," Matt. v. 44, 45. Covetousness is the concentration of affection upon ourselves, the application of our energies to our own exclusive benefit. It is a sin which cuts off our neighbours from the advantage which the beneficent Creator designs that they should realize from our prosperity. It directly defeats the purpose for which we are made subjects of the Divine bounty. As it is opposed to God's love in itself, so is it equally hostile to that Divine principle in us. It is a formidable obstacle to the process of spiritual renovation in general; but it is utterly and for ever at variance with the spirit of the filial relation.

If we admit the distinction of some theologians between the child and the servant of God, this sin, as we have shown, is equally opposed to faithful service, since it is invariably associated with injustice to the trusts reposed in us. So far as the christian professor yields to its indulgence, he is both a treacherous steward, and an alienated child. He is more. He was in a bondage the most oppressive and degrading, a captive exile in a horrible pit, fast bound in affliction and iron, sitting in darkness and the shadow of death. He has been the subject of a glorious deliverance; and now, in-

stead of rejoicing in his freedom, he looks upon the condition of his associates in captivity with regret and envy. Instead of standing fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made him free, he sighs again for the yoke of bondage, the task-master, and the prison house. He is impatient of his freedom; the carriage of his spirit is a gratuitous crouching; there is servility in all its attitudes; he courts the restoration of slavery, and openly proclaims his desire to rivet his ancient bonds upon all his faculties and affections.

Those who persevere in such a course must eventually succeed. The mercy of God transcends the limits of human comprehension; and of its amazing reach and forbearance, these individuals are eminent examples. But though He may restrain the corruption, he will not coerce the will of man. Resistance, continued and resolute, must ultimately prove fatal; and oh! how numerous are the melancholy proofs that the grace of God may be thus effectually opposed! "Ephraim is joined to idols; let him alone." And when God finally gives up men to their own wills, confirms their choice, and allows them, without interruption or disturbance, the full play of their corrupt inclinations, their condition is hopeless. The silence of the heaven above, the calmness of the deep beneath, the hushing of conscience within, are omens of the coming hurricane; and destruction, while it seems to repose in its lair, is couching for the fatal spring.

In the dispensation of his gifts, God appears to act upon a principle which is commonly understood and recognised among men. He imparts blessings of comparatively small value, as tests of character and fidelity; or he places us in situations of light

responsibility and low privilege, that we may thus evince how far we are prepared for more weighty trusts and more distinguished honour. In the matter of spiritual blessings, we are instructed that "whosoever hath, [and duly improves,] to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance : but whosoever hath not, [with improvement,] from him shall be taken away even that he hath," Matt. xiii. 12. But beyond this, we find the principle carried out and applied to temporal possessions, which are represented as intrusted to us in order to our reception of Divine riches in case of our fidelity. We are to be disciplined as stewards, preparative to our being endowed as possessors.

Unfaithfulness to the trust of property, therefore, is not an evil which terminates in itself. The principle of fidelity in all cases is the same, and God will not lavish his higher gifts where those of less value are misemployed. As our Lord argues—"He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in much : and he that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon," one of the smallest and least valuable of the Divine gifts, "who will commit to your trust the true riches?" the best and most estimable blessings of Heaven. "And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's," which belongs to your indigent neighbours, and to the work and cause of God, and which is committed unto you under a solemn responsibility, "who shall give you that which is your own?" those spiritual gifts which tend to your highest personal advantage, Luke xvi. 10—12. The sum of this important piece of instruction is—That our religious entertainments and delights de-

pend upon our faithful application and use of that measure of wealth with which we are intrusted. Since, therefore, covetousness is essentially connected with injustice to the responsibility and rights of our stewardship, it must, in every form and degree, prove an insuperable bar to anything like eminence in the christian life.

The state of the church supplies abundant illustration and evidence of this arrangement. The poor, as most faithful in their scant measure of the unrighteous mammon, have committed to them the greater abundance of the true riches. If among the wealthy we find eminent christians, they are such as are remarkable for their fidelity to the trusts of God's providence. And when we consider the prevalence of covetousness, we need not be surprised at the comparatively low state of religious experience which obtains among us. There may be other causes to which in part it may be referred, but this, of itself, is sufficient to account for the spiritual poverty of the mass of those who bear the name of Christ. We have, indeed, every reason to believe, not merely that their spiritual communications are small, but that of the little they do receive they do not make suitable improvement. The disposition to unfaithfulness is not one that can be restricted to temporal possessions. Where it is allowed in these, it will inevitably extend to more valuable blessings. This is the fundamental truth of our Lord's discourse, and it is confirmed by every remark which we can make upon the human character. "He that is unjust in the least, is unjust also in much." So that were it possible for God to communicate to the covetous professor as largely as to his faithful people, he would remain a feeble

christian, since it is certain that as he is a treacherous steward, so would he prove a thriftless proprietor.

Spirituality is the element of the christian life. Our only safety is in the possession of such apprehensions of the truth, and such internal principles, as are too deep and lofty to be kindred to the good of this life. The soul is secure that lives in its own secret recesses, far removed from the atmosphere of sensuality and pestilence with which this world is enveloped. "The munitions of rocks are her defence," and no assailant can cut off the supplies that spring from unsearchable fountains, or are shed from the calm heaven above. Midian and Amalek cannot impoverish him who lives on the food of angels, daily dropped in the dew around his tabernacle.

But the pervading spirit of covetousness is sensuality; and that small measure of piety which may possibly consist with it, must, of necessity, partake of the same character. Where religion is outward, the temptations arising from outward things can hardly fail to depress and occasionally to overcome it. Where the mind rests in means and modes, in external service and external decencies, there is no probability that it will be able to withstand the constant and fascinating appeal of worldly good. Were the condition of the covetous professor one of ordinary exposure, still, considering the feebleness of his faith, we might well tremble for his safety. But unhappily he does not share in this salutary fear. He has no vivid impression of the weakness of his defence, and he therefore ventures into contests which might try the strength of the most eminent saints. That a christian of little faith should at any time be

overcome by temptation is no matter of surprise ; but it would be wonderful if he should escape unhurt who, though scarcely able to cope with the feeblest opposition, chooses to expose himself, where the darts of the wicked fly thickest, to the utmost power of his spiritual enemies. "If thou hast run with the footmen, and they have wearied thee, then how canst thou contend with horses? and if in the land of peace, wherein thou trustedst, they wearied thee, then how wilt thou do in the swelling of Jordan?"

He who lives by faith commits himself and his ways to the hands of God. His heart says, "He shall choose our inheritance for us." He can, therefore, leave results ; he has no further concern in or with them. Infinite wisdom, and power, and love, assume the responsibility, and, whatever may befall, he is freed from all anxiety ; for his Maker is pledged to provide for all his need, and against all his peril. But covetousness is a self-sufficient as well as a self-engrossed spirit. The covetous man will shape his own destiny and fortune, and he, therefore, must take the responsibility of his choice. It is certain that he will have strong and peculiar temptation, but he has no claim to adequate Divine aid. To the faithful people of God it is a source of high consolation that "the Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptation." Yet are they taught to pray, and that as heartily as if no such deliverance was attainable, "Lead us not into temptation." But when an individual has acted in direct opposition to the spirit of this prayer, it is presumptuous for him to expect that God will then interfere to prevent the natural consequences of his own folly. The consciousness that all his difficulties are of his

own seeking, that to the dangers by which he is surrounded he has gratuitously exposed himself,—that he has, when his need was the most urgent, rejected the Divine guidance and wisdom, will always serve to discourage him in his approaches to God. He cannot ask with confidence for the aid which his condition requires. “He is like a wave of the sea, driven with the wind, and tossed.” The result often is, that he succumbs to his spiritual foes, resumes his former allegiance to “diverse lusts and pleasures,” and “the last state of that man is worse than the first.”

God cannot prevent such unbelieving spirits from reaping, in one degree or another, the natural fruits of their headstrong rejection of his counsel, except by inverting the laws of his moral government. No one but a madman would voluntarily place himself in the path of the avalanche, under the idea that prayer could stay its progress. Or, to employ an humbler illustration, no sane man would sow the seeds of the thistle, and expect, through the Divine benevolence, to reap a harvest of valuable grain. The laws of nature are not more regular and inviolable than those of Providence; and to suppose that God will suspend either, to avert the consequences of our self-will and imprudence, is in the last degree extravagant and fanatical.

Such an interference would be a tacit invitation to rebellion; for let a man of sensual temper only be assured that, however absurdly or irreligiously he might act, God would interfere to prevent all unpleasant results, and nothing could prove a more powerful encouragement to pursue without restraint the devices of his own corrupt heart. Were this the Divine plan, there would be no proof of God's

approbation of his faithful people more than of the rebellious, who bear the name of Israel, and this could scarcely consist with justice. In fact, the advantage would be on the side of the latter. Their danger is greater, their strength less, and consequently the degree of Divine aid which their circumstances require is far beyond that which can be needed by him who commits all his ways to the guidance of God.

It is true that some of these ill-advised persons escape from utter destruction, but in what a wretched plight! They escape as the silly dove escapes from the talons of the eagle, with her plumage torn, her flesh lacerated with wounds which will perpetually disfigure and enfeeble her. They escape as captives are said to do from the dungeons of the Inquisition, to bear upon their faces an uninterrupted gloom, to live in constant fear, to start at the rustle of a leaf, to smile no more at the hearth or the board. Shorn of their strength, and permitted to fall under the power of wasting cares and deep despondency, if not of actual despair, during the remainder of their pilgrimage, they walk in darkness, and have no light; and, if they are eventually saved, their escape from perdition is wonderful indeed.

“He that trusteth in his riches shall fall,” Prov. xi. 28; and be it remembered that faith is strengthened by triumph, and enfeebled by defeat. Whether we consider faith as spiritual perception, or as the affiance which results from that perception, the falling into sin will dim the one, and enfeeble the other. As he who rushes into a path of danger of his own choice is sure to be overcome of some temptations, probably of a series of temptations, so

his faith (feeble at first, or he would not thus have gone astray) becomes weaker and weaker by perpetual prostration, until at length it is all but extinct.

With the diminution of faith the great motive of christian obedience must likewise decline. Our love to God is founded on an apprehension of his love to us; and, of course, for its intensity must depend upon the clearness of our perception of the evidences of that love in the spiritual good which we have actually participated. In the days of his early simplicity, the christian contemplates the gift of pardon, the deliverance out of "a horrible pit," the removal of the terrors of the law, and the communication of "peace with God," as blessings unspeakably valuable, blessings for which, could they be so procured, ten thousand worlds would be cheaply sacrificed; and to the gracious Being who freely, "without money and without price," has accorded these, he looks up with ineffable and transporting gratitude. He can declare the devotion of his affections in the appeal of an ancient saint, "Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire besides thee." The principle of Divine love, duly encouraged, will endure no rivalry or competition; and, to a mind endowed with high spiritual sensitiveness,

"'Tis worse than death my God to love,  
And not my God alone."

But as a dimness comes over the perceptions, and the consciousness of the filial relation becomes feeble and inefficient, he is prepared to admit other objects of affection in rivalry to God. If, then, Divine love be the grand motive of christian resigna-

tion and obedience, if it be this which leads us to submit to chastisement, as the token of paternal regard, and to run with alacrity and "patience the race set before us," it is manifest that as any other affection is allowed an ascendancy in the heart, and especially as the desire for riches is permitted to increase, there will be proportionably less resignation in enduring, and less steadiness in obeying. The mind cannot be stationary, and, when unhappily it has assumed this direction, it will advance to greater evil. The causes which operate prejudicially to-day will, except there be some efficient counteraction, operate still more hurtfully to-morrow, because their influence to-day has weakened the opposition of the spiritual life within us. Every succeeding period will find us increasingly feeble, and, of consequence, increasingly captivated by the irregular desires through which we lost our original strength, until, at length, "the backslider in heart is filled with his own ways."

That the christian's happiness depends mainly upon the strength of his faith and the ardour of his love is a truth so obvious as scarcely to need any illustration. Whatever, therefore, affects these, must in the same proportion diminish that enjoyment which is the privilege of every true believer. But, besides this, covetousness is directly prejudicial to christian joy. He who would maintain this fruit of the Spirit must delight himself in the Lord with an exclusiveness suited to an object so transcendently worthy. The undue affection for sensible good will, of necessity, break in upon this state of the spirit, and consequently withdraw the soul from the source of true satisfaction. And, if this be allowed frequently to recur, the power and

habit of religious enjoyment will be enfeebled ; and, the faculty of delight in Divine good being alienated from its proper object, the relish for spiritual blessings is eventually lost. The admission of inordinate complacency in wealth naturally brings a gloom and heaviness on the spirit, and, if the mind be permitted to fall into any of the sins by which this disposition is usually attended, that gloom will be deepened by the withdrawing of the comfortable presence and agency of the Holy Spirit.

Let no one regard this as a matter of trifling importance. Were religion utterly distasteful, had it no delights to recommend it, no peace of mind to accompany it, no cheering cloud by day, nor directing fire by night, it would still be our duty and honour to seek and secure it ; and, considering the absence of all worthiness in man, and his extreme depravity, pollution, and guiltiness, no one could justly complain of having to walk in an uninterruptedly rugged and painful path. But God has not thus dealt with us. In compassion to the infirmities of our nature, he has provided a counterpoise to the powerful temptations by which we are surrounded, and has made the ways of Wisdom to be ways of pleasantness, and all her paths to be peace. It is in the last degree ungrateful to neglect this admirable provision for our happy progress through a state of trial, and to withdraw our minds from, or incapacitate them for the delights which are thus offered to cheer our journeyings to that land where pleasures, the same in kind, though greater in degree, await our arrival.

But christian joy is not without its practical design and its practical utility. "The joy of the Lord is our strength," Neh. viii. 10. The most

happy is the most energetic form of christianity, inasmuch as it can endure more labour, and submit to more severe restorative discipline. Every one is aware of the effect of cheerfulness upon him who has either some difficult enterprise to accomplish or some painful process to undergo. A general may have no doubt of the courage or the fidelity of his troops, but he augurs more certainly of success in all instances where they maintain their spirits; and in many cases of disease, cheerfulness has proved a far more powerful remedy than any which the materia medica could supply.

Human nature, in this respect, is the same both in earthly and spiritual things; and, if the physical effects of cheerfulness are so remarkable, how much more valuable is its influence likely to prove when the mind alone requires its aid, and in the mind alone it has its fountain; when, like the sun, it is independent of outward things, and indebted to none but to Him who first kindled it for the preservation of its light, and the renewal of its fires. It is obvious that the diminution of an agency so powerful and so pervading must materially affect the state of spiritual energy and progress. The christian is a labourer: he may be conscientious and diligent; but, if he possess few of the consolations of religion, there will be as much difference between the result of his toil and that of a more happy spirit, as there is between the labours of a slave and those of a free man. The christian is a soldier: he may be faithful and intrepid; but if he have no high delight in a military life, no genial relish for the toils of spiritual warfare, no keen enjoyment of triumph, his victories will not be numerous. The christian is a traveller: he may be patient and persevering;

but if he have no sense of pleasure from the objects of beauty with which the Creator has strewed his path, nor from the companionship of the associates of his journey; if he do not look forward with earnest and joyous expectation to the termination of his pilgrimage, he will grow weary in the way, and will be passed by travellers who are neither so strong in constitution, nor so confirmed in habit.

Heaven is a land of happiness, not only because happiness is the congenial element of purity, but because it is also the nourisher and preservative of purity. The inhabitants are happy because they are good, and happy that they may continue good for ever. Holiness is everywhere essentially the same. Religion upon earth, so far as it is wanting in the identical features which it possesses in that brighter world, is curtailed of its fair proportions. The church militant, sitting in sackcloth and ashes, is in an attitude wholly unbefitting any church, unless it be the apostate that has forgotten the husband of her youth, and proved unfaithful to the covenant of her God.

Hence christians are not merely invited and encouraged, they are commanded to rejoice, and that as expressly and peremptorily as to pray or to confide in God, Phil. iii. 1; iv. 4; 1 Thess. v. 16. If, therefore, undue delight in riches were a direct evil only as it diminished our joy in the Lord, this, of itself, would be sufficient for its condemnation; and when we consider the re-action of this gracious temper, that it strengthens our faith, increases our love, gives wings to our desires, and nerve to our labours, that it at once anticipates, prepares for, and assimilates to the society of "just men made perfect," we may safely pronounce that whatever takes away from

this bloom and glory of our christianity, is an evil of unspeakable magnitude.

If we consider the natural effect upon the human mind of the indulgence of covetousness, it will appear that there is no mode of the Holy Spirit's operation which it does not palpably affect, nor any of his gracious fruits which it does not prevent from coming to proper maturity and perfection. But, beyond this, it should be recollected that the Holy Spirit is not a mere agency; he is a Person, and, speaking after the manner of men, is the subject of personal emotion. As the Shechinah dwell on the tabernacle of the wilderness, so does he dwell in the hearts of his people; and the gross idolatry of ancient Israel was not more an insult to the one, than is this subtle idolatry an offence against the other. The declaration in the decalogue of the Divine character is equally applicable to both; "I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me," Exod. xx. 5. Who, that has marked the dissipation of ill-gotten wealth, which is so common an occurrence as to have passed into a proverb, can doubt that God still visits upon posterity the idolatry of a wicked progenitor? And are there not instances in which the covetous professor, with his sordidly-acquired riches, has bequeathed to his children the displeasure of a jealous and justly incensed God? How usually are they examples of the most intense worldliness, the most awful moral insensibility, the most thorough alienation from piety! Among christian ministers their degeneracy is a common subject of complaint; and it is sometimes remarked that there is more difficulty in

overcoming the obduracy of such individuals than that of almost any other order of sinners. But this will cease to be a cause of surprise if we consider them as the inheritors, at once, of the wealth and the curse of their unfaithful and idolatrous ancestors. In these, as in many others, is verified the declaration of Solomon, that "he that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house," Prov. xv. 27. Thus did Achan bring upon his children, as well as upon himself, a violent and shameful death; and thus, yet more in point, did Gehazi transmit to his heirs his uncertain wealth and his inevitable loathsomeness.

But, whether or not these views can be substantiated, it need be a matter neither of doubt nor surprise that covetousness is a sin highly offensive to the Holy Spirit, and that he so far resents its insults as, either wholly or in part, to withdraw himself. The only wonder is, that those christian professors who have suffered such evidences of his displeasure should be so little sensible to their loss, or so little concerned about it. A single pang they probably did feel upon the first lively perception of the difference between their present and their former state; but, that past, they become contented with their condition, and now their principal object appears to be rather to prevent the small relics of Divine influence from disturbing their worldly and sensual spirits, than to obtain in any measure the restoration of those unspeakably valuable blessings which they have forfeited.

Let him who requires further evidence of these facts, or on the subject of this chapter in general, seek it in the characteristic devotions of the money-loving professor and his household. The decay of family religion, in such cases, is matter of unhappy

notoriety. In many families it is found inconvenient for the members to be assembled more than once a day. The morning is too valuable to be spared from the shop or warehouse for the worship of God ; and the evening, the sleepy and spiritless exercise of the evening, when all parties are jaded to the last degree, and every energy has been spent in the pursuit of wealth, such an offering of "the blind and lame" may be as well omitted for any advantage which it is likely to procure.

Let it be assumed that the closet is not wholly neglected, and what is the style of devotion which obtains there ? Is it a Bochim, in the memory of sin, and of the Saviour's suffering ? Is it a Mount Carmel, for the descent of the heavenly fire upon the consecrated offering ? Is it a Peniel, for the revelations of the Divine Angel to the spirit, and for the successful wrestling with him ? Is it a Jehovah-jireh for the intervention of God in the extremity of need, perplexity, and sorrow ? Is it a Bethel, for the clear views which it supplies of the opening glories of the spiritual world ; "none other than the house of God, and the gate of heaven ?" Once it was each and all of these ; but now its devotion is like the laying of the staff of the prophet upon the face of death, 2 Kings iv. 31. There is the symbol of power, but the hands that wield it are those of Gehazi, and not of Elisha.

Could we indeed be spectators of that which God alone beholds, what listlessness should we witness, what want of interest, what absence of spiritual appetite, what dulness of expectation and hope, what general religious stupidity, what wandering of thought, what worldly turning back of the affections, what impatience for the end of that weary

half-hour, what regret at the need for so long an intermission of the all-absorbing pursuit of wealth, and, at the conclusion of the exercise, with what emotions should we say, "Thus doth this man serve his God!" But change the scene: view him in the world, with every faculty awake, every sense acute; all eye, all ear, all expectation, full of buoyancy, of spirit and hopefulness, watching for every wind of circumstance, sagacious beyond the ordinary powers of his neighbours; decisive in judgment, prompt in resolution, ruthless and unhesitating in the execution of his purpose, steadily and sternly pursuing the one absorbing object of his affection: and such is the style in which he serves Mammon! And is this the man for whom the blood of Christ was shed? Is he one of "the ransomed of the Lord?" Does the blessed Spirit indeed dwell in his heart? Does he live in the hope of heaven, preferring its glories beyond all transitory good? and does he look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, the day of doom, the new heavens and the new earth?

There is one day in seven for the repose of the toilworn christian, and to him the sabbath is truly "a delight, and honourable." But how does the covetous professor meet this interruption of his darling pursuit? Its tedium must somehow be cheated away, and he grows fertile in devices for this purpose. The morning is happily abridged by unusually late rising. Then comes the forenoon service, which is still treated with a degree of decency, though even here his punctuality is not remarkable. That being concluded, there succeeds the grand effort to get the burden of the day fairly off his hands and his heart. There is a profuse

and luxurious dinner, of course at the cost of the servants' morning; probably company, agreeable conversation, long sitting at the wine, and thus are several hours beguiled away. Stupified by his abundant feeding, and his still more abundant drinking, and with a heart proportionately full of sensuality, the poor wretch presents himself in the house of God at the evening service. Then comes a supper, as intemperate as the previous repletion will allow; and so he congratulates himself that another sabbath is concluded.

How wearisome to such a spirit would be a perpetual sabbath, which supplied no society but that of saints, no exercises but those of devotion! where there was no happy Monday morning in the prospect, and no present indulgence of the table to cheat away his ennui! If the sabbath upon earth, sensual and short and secularized as it is, proves such a burden, how could he endure the sabbath of heaven? If the employments of piety here, though occasional and intermitted, are so distasteful, how could he live in a world devoted to these alone? If the society of earthly minds is so essential to his happiness, what would become of him where the only human associates are "the spirits of just men made perfect?"

This state of things cannot continue long. It must either change for the better by a timely and hearty repentance, or the blessed Spirit will wholly abandon a heart so perverse and rebellious. Covetousness is not a sin that can be held in the same position of growth and energy. With the advance of life it almost invariably becomes increasingly powerful; for the torpor of age is peculiarly suitable to its indulgence, even in its most freezing and

spiritless form of avarice. Hence, besides what is effected by the augmented strength of habit, the lapse of time alone will bring a man into a condition more favourable to the confirmation and absolute dominion of this sordid sin. If, beyond this, his possessions increase, and his wealth is accumulating, the temptations to covetousness will proportionately abound; and thus, as his security is diminished, his dangers are perpetually multiplying. For every returning wealth-laden ship, whose sails make his heart to leap in ecstasy; for every abounding harvest that causes his barns to teem with plenty; for every successful speculation which renders him the envy of his fellows, some gentle grace flies off from his spirit, some measure of Divine wealth is sacrificed, and the unhappy man is more deeply, more wretchedly poor, as all things conspire to make him rich. How then will this process issue? What will be the termination of this easy descent? What, alas! has it been in myriads of instances? Except for some extraordinary interference of God's mercy, what, in the nature of things, must it be?

The mortal lethargy of conscience, the hardness and impenitency of heart, the utter self-abandonment of which such an one is capable, can be appreciated probably by God alone. Yet when we consider the vows that he has broken, the promises which he has dishonoured, the resolutions which have proved feebler than bonds of gossamer to restrain his headstrong depravity; when we think of the light against which he sins; of the Spirit's strivings which he resolutely resists; of the gracious visitations which he has vainly experienced; of the religious joys to which he has not been

wholly a stranger ; of the hopes which he tramples in the dust ; of the warnings and opportunities of amendment which have only tended to strengthen his opposition to the truth ; of chastisement despised, and prosperity misemployed ; of deliverances forgotten, and long forbearance slighted :—when we consider apostacy as the last degree of human guiltiness, and his apostacy as one which years have conspired to effect and confirm, and to the principles of which he becomes more closely wedded as the frost of an inglorious age steals over his brain and his heart ; when, beyond the natural operation of such causes, we contemplate him as the victim of the judicial visitation of God, one of the Pharaohs of every age, who is neither to be stirred by calamity on the one hand, nor affected by remission on the other, the bars of whose unbelief and the record of whose iniquity are alike sealed up, we ourselves may form some estimate, faint and feeble, it is true, yet sufficiently fearful, of the condition into which a persevering course of covetousness will reduce a once promising-professor. “Go to now, ye rich men, weep and howl, for your miseries that shall come upon you. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten. Your gold and silver is cankered ; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton ; ye have nourished your hearts as in a day of slaughter,” James v. 1, &c.

## CHAPTER VII.

## COVETOUSNESS A PUBLIC EVIL.

THAT species of reasoning on moral subjects which is opposite to the characters of individuals is equally forcible as applied to communities. What promotes the real welfare of one man, will subserve the happiness of any number of men; and the errors which operate prejudicially in the case of a solitary subject will rather increase than diminish in their hurtful influence by being brought into action on the minds of a multitude.

The opinion that, of itself, wealth is a good, has already been noticed as a fruitful source of individual covetousness. But the same error not unfrequently obtains in the councils of a nation; and, among a certain class of statesmen, it is a very common notion that the ends of good government are satisfactorily attained by the increase of national wealth. To this, therefore, their measures have a direct and exclusive reference, while any ulterior advantage is rarely, if ever, contemplated. But that which is true in respect to individual aggrandizement is equally true of the increased and abounding opulence of a nation,—that though, in itself, wealth is wholly an indifferent matter, yet coming in contact, as it does, with the corruption of unrenewed spirits, it proves, in by far the greater

number of instances, a practical evil of the most fearful energy. This is a truth so satisfactorily ascertained, that heathen legislators, in more than one state, have deemed it essential to the public weal that certain restrictions should be placed upon the accumulation of riches, either, as in Sparta, by the nature of the circulating medium, or, as in early Rome, by a specific limitation of the property of individuals.

Indeed the decay of national vigour and glory, in numberless cases, may be traced to the direct and natural influence of opulence upon the current habits and manners of a nation. The epoch of political decline has usually been marked by a strong and prevailing passion for amassing large fortunes, and by that increase of luxury which is its unfailing result; for the form which covetousness assumes when it becomes a national vice, is not that of avaricious accumulation, but of lavish and ostentatious expenditure. Avarice is a solitary sin, which loves secrecy and silence; but when men tainted by the inordinate affection for riches, come into constant collision, the disposition is displayed in perpetual and often ruinous rivalry; and wealth itself is comparatively little valued, except so far as its possession is acknowledged and displayed. Thus it befel with the iron empire of ancient Rome. First, there was the rage for aggrandizement; then came unbounded wealth and unexampled profusion. The decay of the national character and manners succeeded, and the sword of the barbarians completed the melancholy and instructive process.

The higher and more philosophic order of statesmen look beyond mere accessions to the national wealth: yet their views, however splendid and

enlarged in the estimation of men of the world, are usually without the slightest recognition of the religious responsibility and uses of riches. Undertakings of public utility, so long as they are discreetly conducted, merit our approval and esteem; but it is to be recollected that there exist claims of a still higher character. To a nation, as to an individual, the honour of God and the moral advantage of man ought to be subjects of the first consideration; and that estimate of wealth, whether public or private, which does not give to these their due pre-eminence, is demonstrably false and anti-christian.

A legislation truly in harmony with the spirit of the gospel is yet a desideratum. Modern nations, nominally christian, in measures properly public, have little to distinguish them from ancient paganism. The institutions which originate exclusively in christianity, and best display its truly beneficent character, are for the most part undertaken and supported by individuals. A national religion, with its appendages, is neither a novelty nor a peculiarity of Christendom; but alms-houses, and hospitals, and infirmaries, on the one hand, with Bible societies and similarly catholic institutions on the other, the legitimate indications of our benign religion, are almost exclusively the results of private piety.

This subject assumes a peculiarly impressive character if we consider covetousness as a vice which ensures national chastisement. One Scripture narrative, to which we have already referred, is to the effect that this sin is so heinous in the Divine estimation, that its indulgence by a single individual brought defeat and shame upon the host

of Israel. The case of Achan was undoubtedly peculiar; but from the word of God we may, without difficulty and without enthusiasm, conclude that when covetousness becomes extensively prevalent, so as to be properly a national sin, the judgments of God, in one form or another, will accompany or follow it. This conclusion does not seem avoidable, except it be denied that Divine Providence interferes in the affairs of states. If God ever visits nations with inflictions properly punitive, there can be little hesitation in allowing that the sin in question is one against which such visitations are palpably directed.

This seems to be proved in the example of ancient Israel, as stated by the prophet Jeremiah. After God, through his agency, had threatened them with a variety of heavy calamities, he assigns as a cause the prevalency of this vice—"For from the least of them even unto the greatest of them every one is given to covetousness," Jer. vi. 13. The address of Jehovah to the prince of Tyre is yet more strikingly illustrative of the subject. "By thy great wisdom and by thy traffic hast thou increased thy riches, and thine heart is lifted up, because of thy riches.—Thou art the anointed cherub that covereth;—thou wast upon the holy mountain of God; thou hast walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire.—By the multitude of thy merchandise they have filled the midst of thee with violence, and thou hast sinned: therefore I will cast thee as profane out of the mountain of God; and I will destroy thee, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire," Ezek. xxviii. 5. 14. 16. The devout and observant reader may profitably inquire, whether we, as a nation, are

not in somewhat similar circumstances, and obnoxious to the like judgments.

Let us proceed to a second view. In common with all human associations, the character of a religious society is determined by that which prevails among those of whom it is composed. Every member contributes to exalt or depress its purity and vigour; and, though the influence of an individual may be esteemed inconsiderable, yet when we regard the intimacy and sympathy of religious connexions, and the amazing power which a single christian may exert for the benefit of his fellow-creatures, it will be evident that an inconsistent and worldly-minded professor is a serious injury to any religious community. In the present day we have to lament throughout the church of Christ a prevailing inordinate affection for wealth; and it would be unjust to our present inquiry not to notice specifically some, at least, of the more obvious evils with which this disposition afflicts a christian society.

The excessive estimation of wealth leads to an undue admiration of its possessors. By those who strongly desire to be rich such individuals will always be regarded with complacency, simply on account of their condition and rank in society. In such cases wealthy professors will exert a degree of ecclesiastical influence which neither their virtues nor their intelligence, considered apart, could ever confer. Thus is there introduced into the church a mode of estimation and arrangement as irrational as it is unscriptural. It would be at once appreciated as a monstrous absurdity if the same sort of classification were to obtain in an association whose objects were purely scientific; and all men

would cry out against it as a desecration of the principle of the society, and as the sure means for defeating its proposed designs. In a professedly christian community it is even more preposterous; for while the man of fortune, from his leisure and his superior station, may rationally be supposed to possess greater facilities for the attainment of scientific knowledge, the contrary is the fact in respect to the things of God. Riches are always sources of temptation, generally of spiritual encumbrance much greater than any circumstances which attend a condition of comparative and modified poverty.

The great apostolic moralist thus reprehends this mode of estimation:—"My brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment; and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my foot-stool: are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts? If ye fulfil the royal law, according to the Scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well: but if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors," James ii. 1—4, 8, 9. If, then, the mere casual respect thus shown to rich men, in christian assemblies, on account of their wealth, were a transgression of the law, much more is it such to assign to them on this ground a permanent rank and influence in the church.

This irreligious partiality, as the same apostle argues, is an injustice to the poor; "Hearken, my

beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him? But ye have despised the poor," James ii. 5, 6. And it is to be recollected that the inordinate admiration of rich men always involves despite to those whom God hath thus specially and peculiarly chosen. The principle which leads to unscriptural complacency in the one case must equally operate in the contrary direction; and, as the former class is unduly exalted, in the same proportion will the latter be unjustly depressed. The poor, in passing through life, are almost daily subjected to some sort of disrespect—

"The oppressor's wrong, the proud man's contumely,  
The insolence of riches, and the spurns  
Which patient merit of the unworthy takes."

And God has chosen them, and called them to take refuge in the church, there to be revered as the subjects of his special election, and usually as the largest partakers of the riches of faith. To depreciate such persons, therefore, is to impugn the Divine decision, to defeat the Divine purpose, and to renew to them in the church the wrongs which in the world they are compelled to endure.

The virtues of our Master were especially the virtues of poverty. He was not so much remarkable for moderation and heavenliness of affection in the use of the good things of this life; for he was rarely in circumstances which allowed the exhibition of these excellencies. It was patience in suffering, meekness in oppression, submission to calamity, the harder and rarer virtues of endurance, which are most striking in his character, and which, like stars,

stand out from the dark night of his pilgrimage among men. However devoted a rich and prosperous christian may be, he cannot, in the nature of things, supply so lively an image of his Saviour as the poor and afflicted of Christ's family. They follow in the very footsteps of the Lord; and they only are able to show forth the peculiarities of his likeness. In every christian there is the outline, but in them alone are the lights and shadows duly blended, and the full portraiture brought out. The opulent saint may be like Christ in what he did, but it is the poor only that can accurately resemble what he was. Disrespect to them evinces a want of perception of his identifying beauty of character; and he who, in this respect, dishonours the members, is certainly defective in reverence for the Head. Be it noted also that, in the day of judgment, it is kindness to Christ's poor, and not reverence to his rich people, which will meet his special approval. The sentence will not run, "I was full, and ye gave me worship;" but, "I was hungry, and ye gave me meat."

The conferring of undue influence upon the wealthy members of a christian community is unjust to such individuals themselves. Wealth has a natural tendency to inflate the minds of its possessors, and this is materially aided by the flattering distinctions with which they are received in general society. It is in the church that the corrective of these unhappy influences is naturally sought; but, if the christian associates of a rich professor second the impressions received from without, his circumstances become unusually hazardous. The native pride of the human heart, of itself, renders sufficiently difficult the attainment of the evangelical

spirit of self-loathing and self-renunciation ; but if every thing be arranged so as to cherish and strengthen its opposition to the demands of the gospel, if christian ministers and christian people make themselves parties to its establishment and confirmation, it is irrational for them to complain that the means employed for its correction prove so inefficacious, or to expect a result in any wise different.

The love of money is materially increased by a consciousness of the influence which it procures among men in general ; and thus is covetousness fostered by ambition. But nothing can so tend, in the minds of wealthy professors of religion, to confirm, and, in a sense, even to sanction the delight in riches, as the fact that the church of Christ is not exempt from the current opinion of their value, and that, even here, they can purchase an eminence which is denied to qualifications really estimable. Nor will this impression be confined to the opulent. The complacency with which they are regarded, and the stations to which, on account of their wealth, they are promoted, will not fail to render the acquisition of riches an object of increased desire among professors generally. Thus may the unmerited elevation of an opulent christian give energy and impulse to the comparatively latent or slumbering covetousness of an entire christian community, and infuse a moral contagion of such strength and virulence as to defy all subsequent sanatory measures.

Promotion in the church in the absence of due qualification is, in general, the means, if not of creating, at least of stimulating the irreligious appetite for power. Hence that disposition to resist

salutary discipline which is so fruitful a source of evil. In our own times, it is to be feared that it exists extensively, but in no man is it so likely to be indulged without restraint as among the wealthy and influential. Where is the rod which is to chastise such an one; or, rather, where are the hands to wield it? In some cases there can be no question that his riches buy off the censure which his sins deserve; or if there be, in the officers of the church, sufficient fidelity and courage to inflict with proper severity the merited chastisement, the probability is, that he will bring the very influence with which he has been indiscreetly invested to bear with destructive effect upon the harmony and prosperity of the church of Christ. Faction and strife in christian societies may very commonly be traced to persons who have been improperly elevated above their religious associates. It is true they are not always distinguished for their wealth; an incorrect estimation of a man's piety occasionally leads to the same result; but a large number of the contrivers and patrons of ecclesiastical agitation are such as have been indebted for their rank and influence in the church to their worldly condition and resources. The mischiefs of which they have thus been the occasion are not to be calculated till the revelations of the day of God.

Different christian communities vary in their judgment on the degree of power to be intrusted to their pastors; all, however, are agreed that a stern, uncompromising, heart-searching ministry is a blessing, for the loss of which no other good can compensate. But if the patronage and resources of a christian society are in the hands of a few wealthy individuals; if a minister knows that fidelity to these

may lead to the most painful sacrifices, or even to the lowest degree of indigence for himself and his family; if he has been taught and compelled to crouch in the parlour, and, by a series of insulting condescendences, learned the absolute servility of his condition—is it to be supposed that he can at once resume his independency and erectness of mind in the house of God; and, forgetful of every thing but his Divine commission and solemn responsibility, can, with unflinching firmness, declare the sin and shame of the church committed to his conduct, and faithfully warn all, especially his patrons, of the evil of sensuality, luxury, and ostentation? There may not be, on his part, a voluntary and conscious compromise with his conscience; but the habit of mind formed under other circumstances is not readily to be cast aside, and, spite of his resolutions to the contrary, will hardly fail to accompany him to the pulpit. And if the tone of a christian ministry be lowered, if it be tainted with latitudinarianism, or deal only in those vague didactic generalities which touch no conscience and affect no heart, then farewell to the prosperity of the congregation to whom it is directed; farewell to the groans of contrition and the tears of godly sorrow; farewell to ardent aspirations after holiness, and to high spirituality of christian attainment. “The legate of the skies” has betrayed his trust; and the hand of God upon every such pulpit writes its unerasable Ichabod.

The character of a christian society, and the general spirituality and consistency of its members, depend, in a greater or less degree, upon the spirit and example of those who occupy its posts of office or influence; but in the community where this

false estimate of worldly good, this subtle simony, obtains, the recognised principle of rank will inevitably lead to considerable degeneracy. A christian of secular influence needs peculiarly elevated and uncompromising spirituality to enable him to occupy an eminence in the church to the advantage of those beneath him; but if, as is not rarely the fact, they who quote his example do it only to palliate their own worldliness; if, in the habits and conduct of their influential brethren generally, the members of a religious association find every recommendation of a loose, low, and spurious piety,—it requires no peculiar sagacity to prognosticate the result. The standard of christian character being thus lowered, and the ideal model of experience and carriage brought into correspondence with the temper of the world, there necessarily ensues an indifference to the higher attainments of evangelical experience, and a sensual and sordid contentment with “a name to live,” while, as nearly as may be, its possessors are spiritually dead.

The degeneracy of a church is an evil which cannot terminate in itself. The disciples of Christ are his representatives on earth, to be what he was, to walk as he walked, to do as he did. Of the treasures hid in him do they participate, the same in kind, though less in degree, differing from him as the earthen lamp differs from the solar fountain of light. The great work which he personally commenced he bequeathed to his church; and by human agency, duly applied and Divinely accompanied, the purposes of infinite benevolence are progressively to be realized, “till the Spirit be fully poured out from on high, and the wilderness become a fruitful field, and the fruitful field be counted for a forest.”

An injury to personal piety, therefore, is a public wrong. Lights dimmed or quenched in the church diminish its amount of illumination in the world. Every christian professor who is not labouring to be conformed to the image of Christ is depriving mankind of some good which can be communicated by his agency alone. On the other hand, he who lives in habitual communion with God is surrounded by a Divine influence, silent and impalpable, it is true, yet not the less real. Like the high priest, he comes from the holiest place, with the odour of incense fresh about him. His life is the most eloquent of sermons, and the amount of good which he does, merely by living in the world as a christian ought to live, is beyond the power of human calculation. To the church pious example, though of very high importance, is not essential to an appreciation of the truth and sanctity of our faith; but the exclusively worldly man gathers most, if not the whole of his ideas of true religion, not from the standard and testimony of the Bible, nor from the representations of faithful ministers, but from the example of those who are said to be under its influence. It is the volume of man's life which he reads; and as its page is fair or blurred, so does he decide upon the nature and the value of the faith whose characters, it is alleged, are written there.

But the prevailing sin of those members of the church who are intimately associated with the people of the world is covetousness; and no sin is more powerful in divesting christianity of its loveliness and captivation. From the character and conduct especially of these conspicuous professors do men in general estimate respectively things temporal and things eternal. They are naturally

determined in their conclusions as to the value of spiritual good by the ardour and devotion of those who may be supposed to be best acquainted with its recommendations,—who are familiar with its nature, its demands, and its operation,—who bear the name of Christ, and are united to his church. What, then, is the impression upon this subject which an observant man of the world would receive from the habits and manners of covetous professors? He sees them pursuing worldly good with an avidity equal to his own, exulting in their success, and desponding or repining in their failures, just as he himself does in the like circumstances. There is nothing here to lead him to suspect that their appreciation of wealth is at all singular, or that, by possibility, he may have regarded it with an affection which it did not merit. In their religious habits, so far as they are ascertainable, he sees no indication of extraordinary earnestness, or of their regarding the blessings of grace with anything like transcendent delight. He observes that in their worldly occupation they are very jealous of coldness, inadvertency, and indolence; but in seeking “the kingdom of God, and his righteousness,” their main apprehension appears to be lest they should be too ardent, too diligent, too self-denying; and, both in themselves and others, they are sensitively afraid of excess, of enthusiasm, of extravagance. Hence he naturally concludes that, however important spiritual good may be in a future state, yet, here at least, the pursuit of wealth is properly and religiously man’s principal business, the one thing needful, the sum of all practical wisdom.

From the same source he gathers his notions of the sanctity of christianity. He is not ignorant

that our holy religion claims to be the most exalted system of pure and practical morality with which the world was ever blessed; but for the development of its nature, and of the extent of its demands, he looks upon the carriage of those who affect to be governed by its precepts. And what is the result? There is no wild and unjustifiable speculation in which he is disposed to indulge, although to the imminent risk of his creditors, for which he does not find a precedent in the conduct of some one or more of the professors of true religion; and if he discovers in them no direct encouragement, which is almost too much to be hoped for, he at least receives from their behaviour little or no reproof for any finesse, any of those minor commercial frauds, the indulgence of which is so lamentably common among men of otherwise respectable character. It is well, indeed, if in christian professors he meets with nothing which strikes him as scandalous, and which, comparatively obtuse as are his own moral perceptions, awakens his disgust at the sordidness and shamelessness of their hypocrisy.

Assuming that portion of the professing world which stands on the border land contiguous to the world of sense to afford the fair developement of the nature of spiritual religion, who would suppose that a vital and mystic change of heart was essential to christianity? that life was all but too short for the attainment of a preparation for heaven? that the christian course was a succession of conflicts and triumphs, a perpetual striving, labouring, resisting? Is not the impression derived from such sources precisely the reverse? While the preacher of God's gospel, one day in seven, endeavours to stir men's slumbering consciences, the covetous professor,

during the remaining six days, is shedding upon them the opiate of his example. If on the sabbath the efforts of the one succeed in lodging some unwelcome and piercing truth in the unrenewed heart, the influence of the other, during the following week, seldom fails to extract it, and to heal up the salutary wound. Unhappily the latter has to do with minds prepared to receive with avidity the lessons so forcibly inculcated by his habitual conduct; and thus has many a conscience been hushed till the terror of the grave, or the solemnity of eternity, wake once again the treacherous monitor, to sleep no more.

What a tremendous moral calamity would it be if, instead of scriptural, spirit-stirring truth, nothing were to proceed from our pulpits but the vain and lifeless instructions of modern rationalism! Yet the doctrines preached on every hand in the lives of covetous professors of christianity are not materially different. Men with whom we sit in the house of God, with whom we meet at the sacred table, with whom we join hands in every holy ordinance, are the missionaries of these scarcely less destructive heresies: and what would be an occasional heartless harangue, pronounced in a half-filled chapel, compared to the daily, earnest, vital homily of the crowded mart?

It is also to be noted that the inconsistency of religious profession is a source of satisfaction to the unrenewed mind, not only because of the apparent sanction thus afforded to its own sin, but equally on account of its natural aversion from God and true religion. Were the characters of all who bear the name of Christ in harmony with the spirit and requisitions of his gospel, those who behold would be compelled to admire; and though, at first, the

expression of their approval might be reluctantly wrung from them, yet, as they became familiar with the beautiful practical developement of christian holiness, there is reason to hope that they themselves would be led to desire it, and thus to "glorify our Father which is in heaven." But in the irregularities of the nominal christian the carnal mind finds at once the food and the apparent justification of its enmity to the gospel of Christ. It is the disgrace of the covetous professor that, by his life, he bears false witness against his God; but yet more it is his shame that he is an effectual obstacle to the progress of Divine mercy, that he confirms men in their hatred to Christ and his salvation, and that he gives increasing force and virulence to the hostility of a rebellious world.

Had persons of this description constituted the whole of the church of Christ, or had there not been leading spirits of a better complexion, it is morally certain that there had existed none of those glorious institutions which are now in operation to inform and bless mankind. Covetousness is an enemy of christian joy, but it is a joyous christianity alone which is a christianity of enterprise. Gloomy piety loves solitude; it builds monasteries, and consigns its victims to the lonely vigil, the midnight penance, the maceration of the scourge, the abstraction of the cell. It shuts men out from the charities of human nature, and seeks its proselytes by the terror of the sword, the dungeon, and the stake. But evangelical joy requires sympathy. The man who delights himself in God, and feels the energy of religion in his own happiness, is not satisfied unless he can induce others to participate in his enjoyments. Hence the happiest are the most generous,

the most laborious, the most successful servants of God, and of their generation. Thus was it with the Macedonian christians of the primitive church. It was "the abundance of their joy," a joy unsubdued by "a great trial of affliction," which, though combined with "deep poverty," "abounded to the riches of their liberality," 2 Cor. viii. 2; and the great truth illustrated in their example remains unchangeably the same.

Evangelical enterprise is altogether at variance with the maxims of worldly policy. In its principles and in its operations it is, by the secularized christian, but faintly appreciable. It originates in, and is sustained by, a faith more pure and lofty than he can comprehend. Its hopes of success rest not on the cold calculations of carnal wisdom, but in the promises of God; and, spite of human probability and human opposition, it goes forth "conquering and to conquer." In such a spirit were our Bible societies and missionary societies undertaken. To the feeble faith their designs were fanatical and extravagant, and on every hand they appeared to be surrounded by insuperable difficulties. They have succeeded. The most serious obstacles have been surmounted: God has made bare his arm marvelously, and almost miraculously, in the sight of all the people: a spirit of expectation has come upon mankind, and the world eagerly awaits the prosecution of our plans of mercy; the blessed Spirit has anticipated and rebuked our comparatively sluggish movements, and, by signs and wonders, has traced and cleared our path to yet more extensive triumphs. Even to the most sceptical there no longer remains a shadow of excuse for holding back from the enterprises of modern philanthropy.

Yet, even now, we have to complain of the lukewarmness, the carnal prudence, the restricted contributions of our covetous and secularized christians. Such undertakings do not make so large a demand upon our faith as in their absolute infancy; but their claim to our beneficence was never so strong or so evident. Covetousness in principle is infidel, but in its very essence it is hostile to active charity. Its feud with faith is hereditary; its enmity to love is personal. It was the opposer of the benevolent projects of the church in their origin, because they had no sympathy with its wisdom; it now withdraws from them because terrified at their cost. Among the wealthy members of the church of Christ there are some splendid examples of munificence; but, for the most part, we are indebted for the maintenance of our benevolent societies to the contributions of those in humbler circumstances. We still find "the riches of liberality" in the soil of "deep poverty;" and, were the scale of the benefactions of our poor to obtain among those whose resources are larger, there is little doubt but that, in a very short time, the tide of philanthropy would be swelled an hundred fold, and would bless with its abounding mercy every shore of the habitable world.

As in the natural, so also in the spiritual economy, man has his duty, which it is for God to succeed by his prospering influence. Some blessings are imparted to the world through the church; others come immediately from Heaven. Yet even these latter are made to depend on the exercise of faith and the efforts of intercessory prayer. The fulness of the Holy Spirit's agency is never dissociated from the fulness of faith. The ardour and conse-

quent success of intercession depend upon the measure of confiding love in him who prays; but the man unhappily captivated by an inordinate affection for wealth, whose prayers for himself are cold and ineffectual, whose faith is low and feeble, in whom the principle of Divine love can hardly be maintained, and who daily vexes the Holy Spirit by his sensuality and self-indulgence, must rather retard than hasten the effusion of those heavenly influences which are essential to the conversion of the world. Considering, indeed, the extent to which the criminal love of money prevails in the visible church, it is justly a subject of surprise that the triumphs of christianity, at home and abroad, have been so eminent and extensive.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## HINTS ON THE DETECTION OF COVETOUSNESS.

COVETOUSNESS is one of those sins which are odious in name, but reputable in fact. Nothing is more common than the admission of its prevalency; nothing more rare than the confession of an individual offender. Even those christians, who are sensible of the prejudicial influence upon their personal piety of the pursuit and acquisition of wealth, prefer the employment of some less offensive synonym. They complain of the difficulty of providing for their families except at the sacrifice of their own spirituality, of the distracting cares to which the prosecution of business continually exposes them, of the dissipation of heavenly desires, and the religious insensibility which results from their secular occupation. It is well when they will admit thus much; but, unless the foregoing reasoning be altogether fallacious, a confession to this amount is an indication of covetousness which should excite to a serious self-scrutiny. That the diligent and conscientious pursuit of a lawful calling necessarily produces distraction and dissipation of mind cannot be allowed; such is its result only in a wrong state of the affections, only when there is an undue interest in the possessions of this life, and an inor-

dinate attachment to them ; and this, in every form and degree, is sinful. Many and various causes contribute to delusion upon this subject, and so far increase the difficulty of a correct decision upon our own characters.

One of these is to be found in the vagueness and want of precision in the current ideas upon the nature of covetousness. This is so remarkable that it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that in many cases there exists a wilful blindness and perversity of interpretation. With some it is a term which conveys no definite conception whatever : by some it is supposed to be confined to the grossest forms of avarice ; while others imagine that it has no further acceptation than the distinct desire for some article of our neighbour's property. Whatever may be thought of the views entertained in this treatise, it is certainly important for christians in general to be more fully informed upon the scriptural application of the term covetousness. To a man of general information it would be a reproach if he were so ignorant of the laws of his country as not to understand the meaning of the words by which they described crimes obnoxious to capital punishment ; yet this is the condition of no inconsiderable number of christians. Does the Bible denounce in the most explicit manner, and threaten with perdition in a future state, the indulgence of a sin so impalpable or so equivocal as to leave the reader unable to determine what does, and what does not come within the statute ? This certainly cannot be the case. To every law and commination, especially if frequently repeated and earnestly urged, he undoubtedly intends that we should affix a clear idea ; and the condition of that man must be esteemed

very hazardous whose judgment on such a question is either undecided, or short of the truth.

If, in the main, the views suggested in the preceding pages be correct, it will appear that, in itself, the sin of covetousness is of a very delusive character. It is the idolatry of a deceitful heart. It may be developed in the life, so that all men shall recognise it; but this is not essential to its existence: nor, on the other hand, does it by any means follow, because there is no overt act to which suspicion may attach, that therefore all is right within. Most frequently, where the spirit is thus tainted, there is nothing in the conduct that amounts to direct and satisfactory evidence. Covetousness may co-exist with apparent nobleness of character, and with a sincere abhorrence of what, in popular estimation, is mean and dishonourable. The most ardent and cordial declaimer against the more gross and flagrant sinners of this sort may himself, as unreservedly and as idolatrously, prefer the possessions of this life. The fear of disgrace, the desire for reputation, the natural compassion for misery, with several other counteracting motives, may so far prevail as to hold a man at a distance from what would convict him of an inordinate attachment to wealth; but these, it is plain, are agencies which exert no corrective influence over a corrupt heart. That may, and, in the absence of more pure and powerful principles, certainly will, remain under the dominion of this spiritual and subtle idolatry.

To some sins men require to be disciplined. Indulgence, depraved example, or the power of capital error, are essential to their subjugation of the mind. But the sin under consideration is one whose principles are native to every unrenewed spirit, and

whose indulgence is congenial with the affections of every corrupt heart. It is a vice of infinite versatility and accommodation. There is no character to which it cannot suit itself. To the cold and phlegmatic it comes as avarice; to the ardent and sanguine as enterprise or prodigality. The busy love it because it keeps them in a perpetual whirl; the luxurious because it points to the source of all sorts of sensual indulgence. It is not beyond the capacity of the most stupid, nor beneath the sphere of the most elevated unsanctified intellect. It finds its food in opulence, and its stimulus in poverty. All men know the power of wealth; all are capable of enjoying the accommodations which it can supply; and all, who have not some worthier object of love, will lavish their affections upon a minister so serviceable to their need, and so compliant with their caprice.

There is little difficulty in detecting a sin to which the character supplies any considerable contrast. A man of gentle and benevolent temper discovers at once the presence of turbulent and malignant passion; and, on the other hand, one of firm and decisive mental constitution cannot fail to perceive anything of vacillation or undue compliance. But covetousness is a vice which carefully avoids all contrast. Not only does it accommodate itself to every spirit, but it also gradually assimilates the spirit to its own nature. It ascends gently and imperceptibly over the character, doing no violence to any habits or predispositions, and producing no dislocation of the mental or moral powers. Not as one of the fiercer passions does it ordinarily rage or rankle, and so inflict perpetual tortures on its unhappy victim. On the contrary, it is a freezing

sin, one that reduces the vital heat; and often there is no symptom of its presence, except the mortal slumber. Let it have its unrestricted operation, and there are no fine emotions which it does not stupify, none of the natural sensibilities the edge of which it does not dull. Every day finds the spirit of its victim increasingly obtuse. One circle of lifelessness after another cuts him off from the genial warmth of charities, human or divine, and thus gradually, but effectually, contracts the excursions of his affections, till nothing is left but the central citadel of intense selfishness, where he maintains an equivocal vitality, surrounded on all sides by cold and impenetrable rock. There is nothing in this process to startle or alarm. The power of moral sensation is imperceptibly diminished, nor in many cases is it till the torpor of the spirit is complete that there is some sleepy and stupid consciousness of change, which stirs no concern, and is soon forgotten.

Some sins are hedged about by infamy, and can only be indulged at the expense of character, a cost at which comparatively few are willing to purchase their gratification; but covetousness is unfortunately a reputable sin. "Men will praise thee when thou doest well to thyself." Selfishness forms an essential constituent of the prudence of this world, and he who ventures to act under the influence of motives higher, and really estimable, must make up his mind to be misunderstood, if not calumniated. A man, therefore, may employ himself to advanced age in the antichristian accumulation of wealth; and unless he transgresses a certain limit, or palpably interferes with the rights of others, he will go down to his grave with a fair re-

putation, and no one will perceive any gross inconsistency between the eulogy on his tombstone, and the history of his life.

It is a common complaint with moralists that familiarity with vice lessens our apprehensions of its turpitude, and relieves us from the horror with which it was at first contemplated; and perhaps there is no evil respecting which this truth is more apparent. Were a covetous professor of religion a rare character, it may be conceived with what astonishment and disgust he would be regarded; but the prevalence of the sin, even in the church, gives it an authority and commendation, which, under other circumstances, it could not have commanded. It has come to be regarded, therefore, if not as a matter of indifference, yet, at all events, as one of those impalpable and casuistical evils which are wholly beyond the cognizance of ecclesiastical discipline, and which must be left between a man's own conscience and his God.

From these cursory remarks, it will be apparent that covetousness is a sin exceedingly difficult of detection. Everything in its own nature and influences, the state of the human heart, the constitution of society, the habits of christians,—all conspire to cast around it “a cloud and thick darkness.” Such considerations enable us to account for the absence of suspicion even where it exerts a powerful influence, and the want of jealousy where its presence is less evident. They also suggest the necessity of a peculiarly severe investigation into the state of our own affections, since it is manifest that a merely superficial inquiry will prove of little or no advantage.

Does the christian reader wish to ascertain

whether or not this evil exists in his heart? Let him see to it that his desire is sincere, that it is founded on the love of truth, that he is willing to know his real character, even to its worst peculiarities. Many make fair professions of impartiality, who, if taken at their word, and brought to scriptural tests, shrink from the inquiry just on the eve of the most important discoveries. In the present case no such delusive resolutions will be of any avail. We must be willing to know all the truth, or the examination had better not be commenced. A process of this kind, left incomplete either in its depth or its extent, is likely to be a serious injury to its subject, since it almost invariably proves an opiate to his conscience, and leads to the dangerous conclusion that because no evil has been detected, therefore no evil exists. Let us not, however, conceal the fact that the inquiry here proposed is not only difficult, but will often prove painful. The man who has to search for the most subtle of sins in the most deceitful of lurking-places, and to detect it in a disguise so deep as frequently to enable it to marshal with our virtues, has need of much acuteness and patience; but to pursue discoveries which cannot but be fatal to our self-complacency, which must mortify and humble us, which will demand contrition and sacrifice, requires a large measure of christian sincerity and fortitude.

An examination of this sort must never be regarded as other than practical. It is absurd to inquire after evils which we do not intend to put away. The partiality which would lead to their retention is likely to blind us to their existence; or if, in spite of its delusive influence, we succeed in ascertaining the truth, it can only be a source of

profitless disquietude; while an indulgence in sin, with a full perception of its nature and enormity, is an effectual means for destroying all gracious sensibility, and will prove, in the day of judgment, the most tremendous aggravation of our guilt and punishment.

Such are the terms on which we invite the reader to examine the state of his own heart. If he be unwilling to submit to them, it will be better for him here to close the book, and to dismiss its contents from his memory; but if, by Divine help, he is prepared to accede to these preliminaries, let us go forward in the name of God, and in a spirit of humble prayer and devout confidence. It is no little thing, no small evidence of the influence of grace upon his heart, that he is thus disposed to seek the truth in the love of the truth, and that at probably no small cost. It augurs well as to his future success, both in discovering and in sacrificing that which is sinful. The greatest difficulty is overcome when the perverseness of self is obviated, and the remaining parts of a moral inquiry are comparatively easy.

It is a solemn consideration, and one which, if duly appreciated, can hardly fail to exert a salutary influence, that we are rapidly tending to a period when an investigation shall be instituted into our characters, in which there will be no possibility of delusion or error. The nearer we can approach in thought to the grandeur and awfulness of that day, the more fully we can bring ourselves within the strict impartiality of its proceedings, the more accurately we can apprehend and apply the tests of character which will then be employed, the less likelihood is there that our judgment upon ourselves

will partake of vanity or falsehood ; and although, in our present condition, surrounded as we are by objects of sense, and compelled to receive our ideas through a sensible medium, we cannot attain that spirituality of conception by which the actors and the spectators of the final day will be characterized, yet there can be no doubt that we may so far enter into the spirit of its inquisition as to attain a satisfactory degree of self-knowledge.

Be it recollected, then, that the decisions of the day of judgment will not be according to human glosses of Scripture, or the technicalities of this or the other particular school or approved systems of divinity, but "according to the gospel." Truth is now frequently encumbered by expositions and qualifications ; it is compelled to bend to theories on the one hand, and to countenance extravagances on the other ; but then it will fling these off as the immortal spirit casts aside the frailty and infirmity of its mortal body, and will stand pure and undisguised beside the eternal throne. He, therefore, who would anticipate that infallible judgment, must, as far as possible, be divested of all preconceived opinions, all mere human theology, all sectarian peculiarity. He must abstract himself from prevalent notions and popular theories, and shut up his spirit in her secret recesses, with his God and his Bible, thus bringing himself into comparison with the nature of the one, and the requisitions of the other.

Another peculiarity of the final decisions will be their individual independency. Now we compare ourselves among ourselves, and judge ourselves by ourselves. In the error of one, and the latitudinarianism of another, we seek the sanction of our

mistakes, and the justification of our practical irregularities. No mode of judgment can be more characteristic of the carnal mind, or more agreeable to its motions. But in that day each will be judged as independently of prevalent morality, and of the habits of others, as if there were but one accountable being in the universe, and that one himself; as if there were a law for him alone; as if for him all the pomp and terror of that awful court had been arranged; as if he only could be the inheritor of glory, or the victim of despair. If then we would judge ourselves so as not to be condemned of the Lord, we must leave altogether out of the question what our neighbours think, or what they are. We have nothing to do with the multitude, nor with any individual of it. The inquiry must be conducted with an independence as perfect as if all mankind had been swept away by some sudden desolating stroke, and I alone were left to pass a few hours, and then appear before my God. Woe unto me if I satisfy myself with being as others are! Woe unto every man who sins with content because he sins with precedent! Woe to the model, and woe to the imitator! If, under this delusion, we close our eyes against the truth, better had it been for us, and better for the multitude of transgressors whose example we complacently quote, had we never been born.

It is man's spirit that is to plead before the bar of God. His body will appear there also, but only as an accessory or agent either to his sin or his virtue. Principles and motives, reasonings and affections, are to be the subjects of investigation; and actions are to be evidences for evil or for good. The inquiry of that day will be spiritual. The law

of the heart will stand out as the rule of judgment. All profitable self-examination here must be conducted after the same manner. The absence of external irregularities is a very small matter; decency, and order, and reputation, must be placed altogether in the back ground. In the front of our inquiry, and as constituting its main subject, we must place our hearts, stripped of all disguises with which outward observance may have invested them; and with the records of memory thrown open, and the testimony of conscience thoroughly examined, perform the solemn office of spiritual judgment.

Finally, it is the presence of God which will give the greatest majesty to the last august court of justice: God in his pomp and glory, in his purity and truth, in his wisdom and power, and, happily for us, in his sacrificial flesh, his fidelity and love. It is the light of his presence which will chase all obscurity, and the penetration of his all-pervading mind that will prevent the possibility of illusion and error. Even so, by Divine aid and illumination alone, can succeed our present religious inquiries. In the absence of the blessed Spirit's agency, no moral investigation, and none especially which respects a sin so peculiarly shifting, and illusive, and beguiling, can come to a profitable issue. Let us then, in humility and in scriptural confidence, offer up the prayer of the Psalmist, specially in reference to our present subject; "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting," *Psa. cxxxix. 23, 24.*

The general tenour of reasoning hitherto pursued may assist the devout reader to the fundamental truths necessary in the proposed investigation, and

the particular branches of our inquiry may supply separate topics for more detailed use: he will not complain, however, if, even at the risk of tediousness, we add a few hints, which appear appropriate to this part of the subject.

It is not necessary to repeat the proofs already adduced to show that the man who esteems riches too highly will desire them too ardently, pursue them with too great avidity, and possess them with inordinate complacency. The connexion of these evils will hardly be disputed: for the sake of simplicity, therefore, we may revert to the principle of covetousness, and conduct our inquiries, in the first place at least, with an exclusive reference to it.

The great question then to be determined is, *Do I value riches more than I ought to do?* There are some who by possibility may propose this inquiry to whom we may take upon us unhesitatingly to reply in the affirmative. If any one who has never undergone a renewal of heart, who is not “passed from death unto life,” who only differs from what he always was by a few occasional pious emotions and ineffectual desires, who is not the child of God by faith in Jesus Christ, and who has no scriptural hope of heaven—if any such person should ask, “Do I esteem riches inordinately?” to him, in the place of his conscience, we answer, “Certainly yes.” It must be assumed as a fundamental truth that the estimation of sensible good in general, by the natural man, is invariably excessive and unscriptural. Wealth, in every such case, if not on its own account, yet as an essential means to other enjoyments, will be immoderately appreciated.

We will suppose, however, that in him who comes to this examination there is satisfactory

evidence of his having been the subject of a gracious change, "born again of water, and of the Holy Ghost, translated from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God's dear Son," made the child of God, and the heir of everlasting life. If such a person proposes the inquiry, "How am I to ascertain whether my estimate of riches is correct?" to him we reply,—

I. *Examine the temper with which you meet demands on your beneficence.*

In all such cases there should be a religious recollection of our responsibility. We shall have to give an account to God of what we do, and what we leave undone. The amount of our benefactions in the one case, and the reason of our refusal in the other, will form subjects of inquiry in the final judgment. If our conduct is such as we shall then approve, and such as our Lord will commend, there is satisfactory evidence that we have so far acted under the influence of a correct appreciation of our property; but if we forget that we are stewards of the blessings of Providence, if there is no disposition to welcome, but rather the wish to withdraw ourselves from, the calls of charity; if we examine the cases presented to us, not with the view of ascertaining their merit, and the proportion of assistance which we ought to afford, but to discover, if possible, some valid reason for refusal; if we habitually take refuge in excuses, not even satisfactory to our own consciences, and of consequence inconsistent with christian sincerity, much less adequate to exonerate us from guilt in the day when the secrets of men's hearts shall be judged; if we make our acceptance or rejection of the claims of beneficence to depend upon the humour in which such applica-

tions happen to find us ; if, in these cases, we determine our conduct by that of others ; if the fear of disgrace alone wrings from us the aid which we ought to bestow of love ; if we seek to accommodate matters by as small a sacrifice as may consist with our reputation, and our benefactions are thus altogether disproportionate to our resources ; if an unchristian repulse of an appeal to our liberality produces no compunction, or if an act of beneficence renders us elated and self-complacent, there can be no doubt of our incorrect estimation of wealth. This test is capable of universal application. No man will have any difficulty in understanding or employing it, and its results, so far as they extend, may fairly be regarded as infallible. It is frequently necessary, however, that an appeal should be made to criteria of a more spiritual character. One or other of the following may not be inappropriate.

II. *Compare your present experience with that of the very early periods of your christian life.*

Spiritual infancy is usually a state of great simplicity. It is so in respect to truth. The degree of knowledge is small, but, as far as it reaches, there is peculiar clearness of apprehension, perspicuity of arrangement, and harmony of system. It is so in respect to faith. There are none of those sceptical and casuistical reasonings which often afterwards bring the spirit into darkness, nor is there any difficulty or hesitation in accepting the promises of God precisely as they are offered. It is so in respect to love : delight in God is supreme and engrossing. It is so in respect to purpose : one plain unencumbered design is steadily set before the mind : "One thing have I desired of the Lord ; that will I seek after." It is true that this period

is marked by the infirmities as well as the beauties of infancy ; its feebleness, its inexperience, its immaturity ; but the piety then enjoyed is so pure and fervid, so free from sophistication or guile, as to supply an important test for that of subsequent years.

Let the christian then refer to the beginning of his religious course, and inquire into his estimation of wealth at that time. We can anticipate that many pious persons will be at a loss for a reply, or rather, if they answer correctly, they will confess that they had no opinion on the subject. It was not an object of any concern or regard. They prosecuted their secular duties as conscientiously as at present ; but their affections were otherwise engrossed. They had no anxiety as to failure or success. All they did in the world was done in the simplicity of faith, and the issue of every action, however trifling, was fully, and without distrust, committed to God ; and he to whom the young ravens do not cry in vain bore all their burdens, and supplied all their need.

Yet we would not be understood to affirm that such a state of mind, however, in other respects it may be happy and enviable, is essential, even to a high degree of spirituality. All love, in its primeval ardour, partakes, in a measure, the qualities of passion. All worthy love becomes in process of time a principle. So is it with the most sacred of human loves, which the Scriptures themselves employ to illustrate the Divine, that of the marriage state. Here fervour is by no means an infallible indication of power, nor its absence a proof of feebleness. The lapse of time may cool, but it does not weaken affection ; on the contrary, it confirms, ma-

tures, exalts it. So is it also with "the love of God shed abroad in the heart." At first it is all-engrossing. It fills, it exceeds the capacity. It is the entire man. But the mind cannot continue in this preternatural tension. Either it enlarges, or the first ardours decline; and then Divine love, not diminished, but happily growing day by day, sits enthroned in the spirit, its glory and its sovereign. In the one case, it is like the aurora of the northern skies, beautiful, and widely diffused, but temporary; in the other like the steady lights of heaven, that are "for signs and seasons, and days and years."

An advance in knowledge is necessary to the establishment of love as a principle. It is not enough that the mind has no reason to suspect its first ardour; there must be an increasing development of the excellencies of its object of regard, that it may thus be occupied against the intrusion of unworthy claimants on its attention and affection. There must also be an increase of knowledge upon the nature and claims of sensible good. If the case be otherwise; if the young christian neglect to make himself more fully acquainted with the Divine character, or with the rank of providential blessings, and the degree of thought which they justly demand, the consequence will almost inevitably be, that, as the mind resumes its ordinary calmness, it will turn with an unlawful degree of interest to the objects of sense. Missing the stimulation and impulse which sustained its first spiritual progress, and not being aware of the cause of their cessation, nor provided with those enlarged perceptions of spiritual good which are now essential to its establishment, the things of this life begin to exert a distracting influence; the affections are drawn aside, darkness

and perplexity follow, and, after the lapse of years, the christian finds himself scarcely wiser or holier than when he had only just begun to live.

It becomes an important question, therefore, how far our infancy has been fed with "the sincere milk of the word;" how far our knowledge has kept pace with our age, and to what extent we have realized enlarged views of God and the blessings of grace. On the nature of sensible good in general, and of wealth especially, have we derived our ideas from the teachings of the word and Spirit of God? If, at our entrance into the christian life, we had no thought or estimation of the things with which we are daily conversant, we must subsequently either have received instruction, or have fallen into error. We have a vigilant and crafty adversary, and if as our minds expand they be not diligently stored with truth, he will take advantage of their want of furniture to introduce some of his own wares, if not to effect an entrance for himself.

Thus, then, may the inquiring christian test his spirit. If he does not know God in some proportion to his spiritual age, and if he has acquired no new views of the world and its possessions since he entered upon the christian life, it is all but certain that his estimation of wealth is excessive and mischievous. The probability, indeed, is, that he has fallen back upon the opinions which he entertained in his unregenerate state; and, though they are somewhat modified and counteracted by the influence of grace, yet, to a certain extent, they must have brought him down into habits of thought and affection not dissimilar from those of his unrenewed neighbours.

These observations, it will be perceived, apply to

persons whose early christian experience was marked by peculiar intensity of delight and fervour of love. But there are christians, who, either in consequence of a calmer natural temperament, or of the more gradual and gentle mode of Divine agency, were never subjects of transporting and impassioned emotion. They will easily recall the opinions of their early religious career, in reference to worldly good ; for their minds were so far at liberty as to be able to arrange the gifts of God according to their proper order and value. If, upon inquiry, it be perceived that there is no material variation in their present views from those then entertained, such a concurrence, at these distinct and perhaps remote periods, will supply a strong presumption in their favour ; but if, on the other hand, it should appear that their estimation of wealth has considerably advanced, it is obvious that they are either in error now, or that they were so formerly. But if their former opinion did not interfere with the industrious prosecution of business, nor prevent the conscientious application of their powers to secular advancement, it was certainly adequate to all practical purposes, and anything further was unnecessary. Could the increased appreciation of riches be held as an influential opinion, we might term it useless ; but since that, in most cases, is impossible, we are warranted in deciding that it is extensively pernicious.

III. *Compare your habitual estimate of wealth with your judgment on it when your mind is under peculiarly spiritualizing and restorative influence.*

The condition of general prosperity and that of affliction, assuming the one to be common and the other comparatively rare, may be cited as examples. In the mere man of the world calamity is apt to beget

a weariness of life, a fretful impatience of duty, and a disrelish for every temporal blessing. This supplies no inconsiderable evidence that his previous estimation of earthly good was irregular and excessive. It is the reaction of a sensual spirit upon finding the objects of its confidence so treacherous and unsatisfactory. In this way does the heart almost invariably resent delusion, either upon itself, or upon the object in which it has been deceived. Thus, upon the same principle, it often fares with disproportioned and indiscreet friendships. When the unworthiness of one unwisely loved comes to be developed, he is as much, and probably as unjustly depreciated, as he was before immoderately exalted. The christian may be assured that, in his prosperity, wealth was the subject of irreligious esteem and trust, if, upon remarking its utter impotency either to prevent the stroke of affliction or to relieve its poignancy, he should experience a sense of dissatisfaction and disgust. He who habitually appreciates it aright will be free from all such emotions, since he never suffered himself to fall under the delusion that worldly possessions could materially extend their influence beyond their acknowledged sphere. He never deemed them any defence from calamity, or any considerable solace under it; and, when actually the subject of Divine visitation, he makes no new discovery of their inefficacy and vanity.

The man of spiritual mind and devout habits never fails to profit by chastisement. It brings him nearer to God, gives elevation to his views, and refinement to his feelings; it makes the rest of heaven to appear more desirable, and increases at once his longings and his preparation. In respect to our present subject, it teaches him both what wealth

can, and what it cannot do. Where the regard for it has not been so extreme as to admit the reaction just referred to, sanctified affliction will give a peculiarly clear and impressive view of its real character. Let the christian who supposes this may have been his own case, contrast his habitual judgment with that formed under such circumstances, and it will be satisfactory to discover that they do not sensibly vary.

The judgment formed at a period of peculiar religious quickening, or of unusual spiritual enjoyment, will supply an important subject for comparison to our habitual estimate of wealth. We leave out of the question those ecstatic contemplations in which the mind seems rapt, and even entranced, in a degree, as was that of St. Paul in his vision of paradise. It is not denied that such seasons sometimes occur, though, perhaps, without undue severity, it may be affirmed that they are more nearly allied to enthusiasm than to the sober joys of true religion. They, however, belong to spirits of an uncommon order, and, in themselves, are altogether unusual. But there are periods in which both churches and individuals appear to come under peculiarly Divine influence; and, either in answer to prayer, or of his sovereign mercy, the Spirit of truth and consolation abundantly revives his work in the hearts of his people, or in the world. At such periods our decisions upon moral subjects seem peculiarly worthy of reliance; and, if it be found that they supply no correction of our usual estimate of wealth, we may safely conclude that we are not the subjects of serious error. A striking and painful contrast between our ordinary habits of thought and the views then entertained will, of course, lead to a

contrary conclusion. It often happens that one of the first impressions upon the mind of a christian thus specially brought under the reviving influences of the Spirit, is that of his folly in attaching to sensible good a value so exaggerated.

IV. *Inquire how you endure any considerable change in your circumstances.*

Undue elation is sometimes an evidence of the immoderate appreciation of wealth; yet, when riches come suddenly, the mind, though habitually well regulated, may, for the moment, be thrown out of equilibrium. Such is our feebleness and infirmity, that an unexpected spring-tide of wealth seldom fails to discompose the most calm and steady. In such cases, a short time will usually restore the equanimity, and enable the judgment to resume its wonted composure and correctness. Occasionally, however, such an incident creates the unjust estimate of wealth, and a mind previously under the direction of sound and scriptural views becomes enamoured of the mere amount presented to it. There is a constant liability to evil in this form; and hence accumulation, though by no means immoderate, often becomes the source of triumphant, and even mortal temptation. The fascination of wealth seems to increase in a sort of geometrical proportion; and many, who correctly valued a small income, are certain to forego their sound judgment upon coming into possession of more ample fortune. When an individual who, in poverty or mediocrity, has been humble, patient, courteous, and beneficent, as he prospers in life becomes proud, irascible, overbearing, and restricted in his active charities, there can be no doubt either as to the perversion of his mind, or the corruption of his heart.

We pass this cursorily, because it is an incident which every one has remarked, and from which it is impossible to draw an incorrect inference. The more important inquiry, because involving the more profound developement of character, is, "How do I bear the loss of wealth?" It is a common saying, that we never know the value of our mercies till they are withdrawn, and it contains a truth of which every man's life will supply the illustration. Not only is it true of their real, but equally of their estimated value. In the history of prosperous christians this is often strikingly exemplified. Diligently, yet with great apparent moderation, do they pursue their secular employments. On every hand success crowns their efforts. Numerous channels, of various capacity, steadily keep up their supplies of revenue. They are unostentatious and beneficent. There is nothing to stir suspicion of any lurking evil where there is so much to admire, of any under-current beneath a surface so tranquil, until God in mercy, and perhaps for the very purpose of showing them this their delusion, sends some sudden disappointment or calamity; they lie down in opulence—they awake, and find themselves poor. How many are there who have thus discovered their long-concealed and deeply-latent idolatry! how many have thus been taught the deceitfulness of their treacherous, but unsuspected hearts! how many, when the first pang has passed, and they have been led calmly and submissively to inquire, "Wherefore contendest thou with me?" have discerned, to their deep humiliation, their strong resemblance to the "painted sepulchre," gay without, loathsome within! and oh! how many have had cause to adore the mercy of such a visitation, as, with light, unencumbered step,

they afterwards went on their way, saying, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now have I kept thy word."

It was an illustrious testimony to the rectitude of a greatly afflicted patriarch, "In ALL THIS Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." But the habitual temper of a man's mind is more ascertainable by the mode in which he endures losses comparatively small. In great and prostrating calamities, the christian falls back from earthly things. He feels that all human aid, and all human sympathy, are vain and profitless; that he has no help, and no solace, but that which omnipotent love can supply; and his bleeding and broken heart seeks refuge in God, and casts itself fully upon the fidelity and tenderness of his compassionate Redeemer. But in losses of a less afflictive character the mind summons its own strength, and marshals its own resources, to bear up against them, and then, if ever, does the undue estimate of wealth become apparent. It is shown by an irritated and unsubmitive temper, by fretfulness and dejection, by an angry assiduity in endeavouring to retrieve the losses sustained, and sometimes by a diminution of the accustomed beneficence, and a hardening of the heart against the appeals of destitution and sorrow.

The faithful steward of a human proprietor, when his trusts are diminished, naturally feels anxious to ascertain whether his employer considers himself in any degree wronged by his agency. So, where there exists in the mind of the christian a proper judgment on the subject of temporal possessions, where they are regarded as trusts, of which the absolute proprietorship remains in God, their withdrawal, whether partial or entire, will always lead him to

jealous investigation. He will carefully inquire whether, by mistake or negligence, he has misapplied the wealth committed to him, and whether this chastisement has reference to his past unfaithfulness, or to some hidden design of God for his future advantage. But where, under such circumstances, there is no recognition whatever of the Divine agency, and the predominant temper is a peevish resentment, there is but one conclusion to which we can possibly arrive.

The comparison of our emotions upon the loss of wealth, and those which result from a consciousness of spiritual declension, may materially aid the present investigation. Considering the infinite value of spiritual good, it is evident that its withdrawal should awaken the most painful regret and contrition; and, undoubtedly, no devout man can be conscious of religious decline without a degree of concern and sorrow. But the question is, whether it has been adequate to the greatness of the evil, and whether temporal privation has not been the occasion of a disproportionate regret. A moderated and submissive sense of such a calamity is allowable; yet, in every case, it ought to be immeasurably less poignant than the sorrow resulting from any diminution of the true riches.

The reasons, as well as the proportion of our regret for temporal losses, may profitably be made subjects of inquiry. That regret which comes by a sort of instinct, and for which a man would find it difficult truly to account, is the sorrow of avarice, the love of money for its own sake. That which exclusively respects personal or family inconvenience is the result of an irreligious and selfish judgment upon the nature and design of wealth.

He only mourns the loss of property as a christian whose most painful emotion arises from the diminution of his resources for the service of Christ ; who feels poverty to be a calamity mainly because it restricts his beneficence ; who sorrows for the hungry and the naked, the destitute and the ignorant, the widow and the fatherless, the sick and the stranger, to whom he can no longer, at least in his former degree, be God's minister for good.

It is readily ascertained that our concern under circumstances of temporal privation would be disproportionate and unchristian when the precautions against it are more numerous, more deeply studied, and more assiduously observed, than those against religious declension ; when, for example, we are vigilant in business, but careless of temptation ; when, in any measure likely to affect the one, we are prudent and thoughtful, summoning to our aid the counsels of our most sagacious and trusty associates, and never committing ourselves to any course of conduct till we have duly calculated it in all its bearings, while, on the other hand, in matters which concern our salvation, we are rash and precipitate. What can be said of that man's judgment respectively on the riches of this world, and the blessings of immortality, who always makes heaven yield to earth, who is rarely, if ever, seen in the house of God except on the Sabbath, and who habitually sacrifices the means of grace to his secular calling ? What but that, in his estimation, gain is to be preferred to godliness ; or, still more false and idolatrous, that "gain is godliness?"

V. Lastly. *Examine how far you regard wealth as you are likely to do when you enter eternity.*

God views all things as they are. Heaven is a world

of truth: the knowledge of the blessed spirits who dwell there is allowed to be limited, because, though glorified, they are still finite beings; but it is inconceivable that, in any degree, they are the subjects of erroneous judgment. The christian who faithfully and finally perseveres will share, not in the happiness only, but equally in the knowledge of that pure and unclouded state; "then shall he know, even as also he is known." Truth, throughout the universe, is one and the same. Our perceptions of it are susceptible of increase, but not of change; and however greatly, in a future world, our minds may be enlarged, they cannot be corrected, except where they were in error. If, therefore, upon his entrance into eternity, the christian should be compelled to retract any judgment which he has formed on earth, it is evident that so far he was the subject of delusion. Could we estimate wealth now as we shall in heaven, we should undoubtedly value it aright.

The nearer then we can approach to the judgment of eternity, both comparative and absolute, the more sound and trustworthy will be our decisions. In the lives of many christians there have been periods when, both to themselves and others, they appeared to stand on the very verge of the invisible world. The faculties of some, in such circumstances, are so weakened and oppressed by disease, as to take away the power of reflection. Others are permitted to be assailed by strong temptation, and their minds, in consequence, are gloomy and distracted. Occasionally the outbursts of heavenly glory are so overpowering, as to fix and engross the entire spirit. But there are instances in which the soul calmly stands, like

Moses upon Pisgah, with undimmed eye and unabated energy, to survey the wilderness on the one hand, and the promised land on the other. The past, as the future, appears in the light of truth; and nothing prevents the correct appreciation of the good, both of this life and of the life to come. The judgment of such a period there is no reason to distrust. He who habitually lives under its influence is secure against idolatrous and inordinate affection.

Here, however, an objection may be anticipated. Some will probably question the appropriateness of this test to the ordinary circumstances of life, and will argue that, were such thoughts and emotions to be constantly maintained, they would prevent a proper assiduity in business, and so disqualify for duties not less obligatory than those of devotion. But, if this state of mind is correct and scriptural, it ought, as far as possible, to be preserved, and the degree of worldly interest and concern with which it cannot consist is, by that very circumstance, proved to be unlawful. Our great defect is, that we forget our high destiny, and live as though we had no loftier aim than men of unrenowned minds. To the spirit by which they are actuated, views acquired on the shore of eternity are undoubtedly fatal; but who will affirm that the christian man of business is bound to take them for his models? The exhortations of the New Testament are plainly designed to bring us into the most intimate connexion with spiritual and eternal realities: they never caution us against perceptions too refined, or affections too heavenly. What can exceed such representations as the following?—"This I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both

they that have wives be as though they had none ; and they that weep, as though they wept not ; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not ; and they that buy, as though they possessed not ; and they that use this world, as not abusing it : for the fashion of this world passeth away—Our conversation is in heaven ; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ—Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God—Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat ? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness," 1 Cor. vii. 29—31 ; Phil. iii. 20 ; Colos. iii. 3 ; 2 Pet. iii. 11—13. Do not such Scriptures bind us to live with a direct and constant reference to the invisible state, and to maintain the most vivid impressions of its nearness and solemnity ? Is it possible that the most spiritual can aim at any thing beyond what they require ; and is it safe to content ourselves with anything short of it ?

Let it be observed that we do not speak of a case in which there are extraordinary revelations of heavenly glory. These, as we have before had occasion to remark, are quite out of the limit and rule of the ordinary economy of grace, and without injury to our present reasoning, may be admitted as likely to disqualify men for duty both in the church and the world. Their influence, however, is rarely other than temporary, and is usually modified by the counter-agency of some thorn in the flesh. The

only views which we suppose necessary to be maintained are those of which a strong and undistracted faith is capable ; and it surely will not be contended that he alone can perform his duty to society whose faith is feeble and unsteady. On the contrary, this is to be the great principle of all we do ; by it our life in the world, as in the church, is to be directed ; and he who most fully comes under its perpetual agency will undoubtedly be the most ready and diligent in secular as in religious duty. There may be variety in our perceptions, in our consolations, in our rejoicing ; but in our faith there need be no other variety than that of "the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

Such are some of the tests which we offer to the devout reader. Their appropriateness to individual cases must, of course, depend upon circumstances ; but it is presumed that some one or other may be found apposite to most varieties of character. If the result of their use should be satisfactory, the christian has only to "walk by the same rule, and mind the same thing." God has set no limit, either in time or in eternity, to his religious advancement. Let his faith and hope be proportioned to his vocation. He has one thing to do ; "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth to those things that are before," he has to "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Simplicity of design, ample expectation, and earnest effort, will make him eminent upon earth, and glorious in heaven. Amen.

If, however, such an inquiry as we have here endeavoured to aid, should lead to painful conclusions ; if the reader should be convinced that he has valued wealth more than it deserves, it will be well for him

to trace the influence of this erroneous estimate, and to ascertain the extent to which it has affected his heart and life. Let him thus get the subject fairly before him, and then hopefully look up to his great Advocate, who "is able to save TO THE UTMOST those that come unto God by Him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them." Encouraged by perceiving the greatness of the salvation to which he is called, and the unlimited benevolence and power of his Saviour, let him, without delay, set himself to seek and to employ the remedy which Divine wisdom and mercy has provided. "Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven? (that is, to bring Christ down from above :) or, Who shall descend into the deep? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.) 'The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth and in thy heart.'"

## CHAPTER IX.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR THE CORRECTION OF COVETOUSNESS.

THE christian who, by Divine light and grace, has been enabled to detect in himself the sin of covetousness, has every encouragement to proceed to the use of the means for its removal. If we consider the prevailing delusions upon this subject, even in the church of Christ, and the multitudes who are under their pernicious influence, without once respecting the wretchedness and peril of their condition, it will be evident that it is a signal mercy to be led, though at the cost of much pain and mortification, to a perception of the truth as it respects ourselves. If, in ordinary cases, the discovery of an evil is half its cure, we may venture to say that a successful termination of our inquiry, in the present instance, will go yet farther towards the correction of the evil whose existence is thus ascertained.

The communication of that Divine light necessary to the detection of this or any other secret sin is a tacit pledge that a sufficiency of strength will be imparted for its correction. All Divine revelations, whether in the word or in the heart, have a practical design; and God makes known no truth which he does not intend to be brought into salutary operation. In every instruction, therefore, he assures us of ulterior purposes of mercy, and of the

aid needful to their accomplishment. He commences no moral process which he does not design to complete, and nothing can prevent its completion but our wayward refusal of co-operation. Thus then may the devout christian reassure his faith and hope from the Divine immutability.

Every renewed mind, upon the detection of its depravity, feels that contrition and repentance are its first duties. By a sort of moral instinct, indeed, these regularly ensue; and he whose heart is right with God can never feel that there exists within him what is offensive to the Divine purity without emotions of gracious sorrow. These require cherishing and encouragement. We need not fear excess of grief at having offended a benefactor so gracious. However venial and unimportant a sin may appear in itself, the authority and holiness of God on the one hand, and our unspeakable obligations to his mercy on the other, so aggravate its guilt as to render it worthy of everlasting remorse. But, apart from these considerations, covetousness is no slight offence. It is so directly opposed to the Divine supremacy, and so utterly and essentially at variance with every peculiarity of evangelical truth, that, of its own nature, it demands a contrition unusually deep and permanent.

Repentance is a duty which we owe to ourselves, not merely on account of the wrongs inflicted on our best interests, but equally because of the salutary effect which it may be expected to produce upon our future religious condition and progress. In its natural operation it softens, refines, and spiritualizes; it dissipates the mists which becloud our perceptions, renders the heart susceptible, the conscience tender, the desires heavenly. Beyond its

immediate and present benefit, it tends permanently to increase our aversion from sin ; and, still further, it is the process through which God has appointed that we should arrive at the enjoyment of his favour and love. And when the breathings of the contrite heart are met by pardoning mercy, when ashes are exchanged for beauty, and the spirit of heaviness is laid aside for the garment of praise, the memory of our gracious tears will prove the fountain of a self-abasement more deep and tender than can be known to any but the repentant and pardoned sinner.—“ And I will establish my covenant with thee ; and thou shalt know that I am the LORD : that thou mayest remember, and be confounded, and never open thy mouth any more because of thy shame, when I am pacified toward thee for all that thou hast done, saith the LORD God,” Ezek. xvi. 62, 63.

Let us not wrong ourselves by supposing that covetousness can be absent, except from that state of mind which ensues upon the application of the pardoning mercy of God. Let its evil and depravity be represented with ever so great clearness and force ; let its present peril and its fearful results be demonstrated from the testimony of Scripture, beyond the reach of the most resolute scepticism ; yet nothing of this kind will, of itself, correct the sensuality of the unrenewed mind. Men must have some object of love. No one either will or can desolate his own nature. He may remove far from the sphere of worldly wealth and pomp ; he may seclude himself from human society, and seek refuge in the utter loneliness of a La Trappe ; he may mortify the appetites of the flesh, and waste his body with perpetual and destructive penance ; but he cannot shut out his heart nor exclude from

it the power and necessity of loving. That state of abstraction and absolute indifferency which the oriental mythology paints as the highest conceivable perfection is what never did and never can exist. The wretched devotee of that unhuman superstition may, to a certain extent, succeed in stupifying his spirit, and in repressing the emotions of nature; he may disguise humanity within and without; but even he cannot cease to be a man.

If, then, the grasp with which we hold the blessings of this life be relaxed, it must be by the attainment of some higher good. If the strong man be expelled, it must be by the entrance of one yet stronger. If we cease to love the world, it can only be by the constraining power of Divine love. Here is the great, the only effectual antidote to covetousness,—DELIGHT in God. But no man delights in God who is conscious of his displeasure. He may have “the spirit of bondage unto fear,” and under its influence he may seek to avoid those evils which he feels have induced the condemnation of the law. He may strive to serve and honour God, and may be exemplary for his assiduity, his vigilance, and his conscientiousness. Of such a one it may scripturally be said, that he is “not far from the kingdom of heaven.” If he do not content himself with his present condition, if he altogether renounce dependence upon his own works, if he steadily and submissively pursue the guidance of the blessed Spirit, he will undoubtedly arrive at the enjoyment of the filial relation, and, with it, of filial emotions; but till that period, till, from a consciousness of the Divine favour, he can thus delight himself in God, the objects of sense will be regarded with irregular complacency.

From another mode of reasoning we may deduce a similar conclusion. To the unrenewed heart unrenewed appetites are essential. It is absurd to suppose that a mind can be carnal, and yet its affections spiritual. "Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles?" and is it not equally impossible for an unregenerate spirit to bring forth such fruits as Divine delight, desire, or devotion? Sensible good belongs to the natural man, and he cannot do otherwise than prefer it. To the spiritual mind alone can spiritual good be so much an object of love as to counteract the fascinations of things seen and temporal. He, therefore, who would cease to attach to wealth an exaggerated value, must seek the remission of sin, and the renovation of his nature. Nothing short of this will avail. "If any man be in Christ, there is a new creation: old things are passed away, behold, all things are become new."

These truths are not peculiar to any stage of religious progress. If the true believer is made conscious that he values wealth to excess, the grand remedy is the same. Still may he look to the entering in of the love of God, and to its transforming agency, as the effectual corrective of inordinate earthly affection. His circumstances, however, differ considerably from those of the unpardoned and unrenewed. He has the principle which the others have not, and he is, therefore, accessible to agencies which, though wholly inadequate to its creation, may prove of great service to its growth and development. Such, for example, are a larger measure of the Spirit's light, an increase of thoughtfulness and recollection, an inquiry into moral subjects more profound and patient than has hitherto been prosecuted. The secret of their efficacy

is usually to be found in the aid which they afford to faith in itself and in its operations. The great defect of a mind prone to the immoderate appreciation of wealth is the feebleness of this principle, considered as spiritual perception. All increase of light, all enlargement of prospect, all clearing up of the mists of sensuality, directly tend to the strengthening of faith. As truth is perceived by the renewed mind, in similar proportion is it esteemed; as our views are spiritualized, so are our affections refined; and as faith is confirmed, so is love inflamed.

Connected with the principal subject of this treatise, there exists among christians much inadvertency and thoughtlessness. Opinions which they entertained in their unrenewed state they have carelessly brought with them into their christianity; and these, simply for want of examination, still exist, and operate perniciously. The moral nature of wealth is one of the topics which will illustrate these remarks; and it is surprising how little accordant with obvious truth are the current opinions on it, even in the church of Christ. Ask one christian of ordinary character why he wishes to acquire riches, and he will smile at what he esteems the folly of the question; while another will reply that his only object is to secure for himself and his family a comfortable competence. Strange as it may seem of real christians, there are but few who, in their secular employment, "seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," or to whom it ever occurs that the pursuit and acquisition of wealth can be justified only so far as it subserves their own piety, and, through their stewardship, the benefit of men. Nay, on the

nature of riches the popular notions are so vague, that the suspicion of their intrinsic worthlessness may be regarded as no inconsiderable advance, especially if combined with the inquiry why, and to what degree, they may be esteemed. So long as these indefinite and delusive notions prevail we cannot rationally hope for any extensive correction of covetousness. In order to this the first requisite is a clear perception of the nature, the uses, the moral influence, and the responsibility of wealth; and though the truths elicited by an examination into these subjects, for the most part, appear all but self-evident, yet their due appreciation is so rare, that the christian whom they properly impress has very nearly arrived at the removal of the evil in question.

In this state of things it is no wonder that definite calculation is of very uncommon occurrence. A man may pass a long life in the christian church, and not meet with a single individual who has any idea of restricting himself to a certain amount of personal property; yet nothing can be more rational, nor apparently, for a religious man, more necessary. Except in cases of absolute poverty, fidelity to our stewardship imperatively demands the separation from common uses of a due proportion of our possessions for the work and glory of their undoubted Proprietor; and, if the sense of responsibility were so far influential as to induce christians to fix a definite boundary beyond which they would devote their entire gains to the uses of beneficence, it would undoubtedly prove an efficient preventive and remedy to covetousness. Supposing the limit determined in early life, and with conscientious moderation and accuracy, this, of course, would put an end to

all criminal accumulation. A large income would be an object of desire only for the sake of the cause of God, and the service of mankind; and the mind, being thus freed from selfish motives, would come under the due dominion and impulse of the love of God. It is difficult to perceive how a man who neglects this duty can escape the influence of covetousness.\*

\* The following narrative is a singular and truly christian example of this rare sort of limitation :—

“Nathaniel Ripley Cobb displayed the character of a CHRISTIAN MERCHANT in all its varieties of excellence. He was born November 3, 1798; in May, 1818, joined Dr. Sharp’s church in Boston; commenced business in 1819; married Sarah, the daughter of T. Kendall, Esq., in 1820; and after several weeks of decline, expired May 22, 1834, in the 36th year of his age. He was one of the few noble-hearted men of wealth, whose affluence is constantly proved by their munificence. Yet it was not always from what is strictly denominated affluence that he was so benevolent, inasmuch as the vows of God were upon him that he would never become rich; and he redeemed the holy pledge which he had given by consecrating his gains to the Lord.

“He resolved, at the commencement of his religious life, that he would serve the Saviour with all his power in that sphere which seemed to be particularly assigned to him. He had not an opportunity to acquire extensive learning, and he could not serve the church, to any considerable extent, by his voice or by his pen. But God endowed him with very unusual talents for business. He had great activity, acute penetration into the characters of men, and into the signs of the times, rapid decision, and unconquerable perseverance. He displayed in the counting-room some of the mental qualities which made Napoleon the irresistible victor in a hundred battle-fields. In November, 1821, he drew up the following remarkable document :—

“ ‘By the grace of God, I will never be worth more than 50,000 dollars.

“ ‘By the grace of God, I will give one-fourth of the net profits of my business to charitable and religious uses.

Another subject on which prevalent opinions are very loose and unsatisfactory is the heinousness of

“‘If I am ever worth 20,000 dollars, I will give one-half of my net profits; and if I am ever worth 30,000 dollars, I will give three-fourths; and the whole, after 50,000 dollars. So help me God; or give to a more faithful steward, and set me aside.

“‘ Nov. 1821.

N. R. COBB.’

“He adhered to this covenant with conscientious fidelity. At one time, finding his property had increased beyond 50,000 dollars, he at once devoted the surplus, 7,500, as a foundation for a professorship in the Newton Institution, to which, on various occasions during his short life, he gave at least twice that amount. Though a baptist, and ever ready to perform any service for the church and the denomination to which he belonged, yet he was prompt in affording aid to all wise designs which appeared to have a claim upon him as a christian, a philanthropist, and a patriot. He was a generous friend to many young men, whom he assisted in establishing themselves in business, and to many who were unfortunate.

“Seldom was this excellent man absent from any meetings of the church, even amidst the greatest pressure of business. He rejoiced in the conversion of sinners, and constantly aided his pastor in the inquiry meeting. His temper was placid, his manners affable, his integrity entire. He was, besides, distinguished by great business talents, and by an acute penetration into the characters of men. Energy and activity were his element. We could willingly transcribe his diary before us; but a very few short sentences, uttered in his last sickness, must suffice: ‘Within the last few days, I have had some glorious views of heaven. It is indeed a glorious thing to die. I have been active and busy in the world. I have enjoyed it as much as any one. God has prospered me. I have every thing to tie me here. I am happy in my family; I have property enough, but how small and mean does this world appear when we are on a sick bed! Nothing can equal my enjoyment in the near prospect of heaven. My hope in Christ is worth infinitely more than all other things. The blood of Christ! the blood of Christ! none but Christ!’”

this sin. He who would obtain its correction in his own heart must become much more fully acquainted, and much more deeply impressed, than is usual among christian professors, with both its nature and its exceeding malignity. In the absence of correct and affecting views upon these subjects, its indulgence is hardly to be avoided. If it be regarded as a sin of no moment, which is the common idea, men will not meet it with the horror and aversion which it merits; and in an age so lax as the present it will ordinarily meet with encouragement and indulgence. But were it habitually considered, as it really is, a sin, the guilt of which is enhanced by every conceivable aggravation, as idolatry the most base and flagrant, as a treasonable assumption of the rights of God, and a felonious evasion of the claims of our neighbours, as in the last degree perilous to individual piety, and as the subject of the most explicit Divine denunciation, we might rationally hope that, by sincere and upright minds, it would be regarded with an abhorrence in some measure proportioned to its turpitude. Such, therefore, is the impression which the christian should seek to realize and maintain.

Of the more direct means for obtaining and increasing spirituality of mind, one of the most important is devout meditation. This is the more necessary in order to preserve from vain imaginations; and especially from those illusive day-dreams, those visions of profusion, and pomp, and ostentation, which are such strong incentives to the affection for riches.\* The appropriateness of

\* The disposition to this sort of reverie, with the direction towards wealth which it generally assumes, has not escaped the notice of any eminent students and sketchers

the subjects for our thoughts depends greatly upon the constitution and habits of individual minds. To some the considerations most replete with benefit are such as directly respect the dying love of Christ; others will probably be more moved by a consideration of the glories of the heavenly world; while to a third class the purity of the Divine law, the evil and danger of sin, and especially of the sin before us, will prove most profitable. Each in its turn may be resorted to, and the christian will soon discover the class of truths which exert the most powerful and beneficial influence over his own mind. Yet it is to be recollected that enjoyment is not the proper test of real advantage. Those subjects to which the mind most naturally turns are not always the most suitable to the correction of its evils. In a large proportion of cases the contrary, indeed, is the fact; and the most profitable meditations are such as require the greatest thwarting of the natural inclinations. And considering the native obliquity of the understanding, and depravity of the heart, it need not surprise us that, among immature or partially instructed christians, there is an aversion from the truths of all others most likely to prove beneficial. Our own religious failures and defects, for example, when properly considered, have a direct tendency to humble, and to waken us to jealous vigilance. They instruct us, also, as to the peculiar evils by which we are most prone to be led astray. Combined, therefore, with meditations upon the prevalency of the atonement

of human nature. The Alnascher of the East and the Malvolio of the West, if not portraits, are so profoundly characteristic of the depraved heart, that they might readily pass for such.

of Christ, they are likely to produce a highly valuable effect, and yet there are few subjects to which there is a greater and a more natural reluctancy to advert.

Another means is scriptural research. This must be associated with the foregoing, in order to supply, fresh and pure, the materials for our meditations. What is true of the one, as to the adaptation of the subjects, is equally so of the other. Yet, as the whole of the Bible is occupied by the various developments of the system of moral restoration, as it wholly consists of lines of light radiating from the centre of eternal splendour, so whichever we pursue will lead us eventually to the same point.

But though no scriptural instruction be absolutely inappropriate to the spiritualizing of the mind, yet, when a specific evil is to be corrected, there are truths of such peculiar aptness as to demand special notice and consideration. A number of the statements in the word of God are obviously intended to prevent or correct the inordinate attachment to wealth. Such are those which teach us the intimate connexion between beneficence and worldly prosperity, see Prov. xi. 24, 25, xiii. 7; 2 Cor. ix. 5—15. Such also are those which demand our fullest preference of divine good, on the ground of the attendant blessing of God, even on our temporal affairs. Thus we are instructed, that godliness with contentment is great gain; that it is profitable unto all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come; that if we seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, all things necessary to our happiness will be superadded; and, in short, that to him who delights himself in the Lord, will be given the desire

of his heart, 1 Tim. vi. 6, iv. 8; Matt. vi. 33; Psa. xxxvii. 4. Truths of this order, when duly pondered, which go to impress us with the folly and improvidence of covetousness, and the wisdom and advantage of personal consecration, can hardly fail to confirm our confidence in God, and to encourage us to all necessary corrective measures. The earnest love of God's book, the storing the mind with its contents, the imbuing the heart with its spirit, have ever been found corrective of inordinate affection, especially when combined with the prayer of the Psalmist, in sentiment at least, if not in expression, "Incline my heart unto thy testimonies, and not to covetousness," Psa. cxix. 36.

In all cases, indeed, it is necessary that our religious meditation and searching the Scriptures should be accompanied by earnest prayer. By this we are led to understand the word of God in its depth and comprehensiveness of signification; by this we are enabled to preserve the steadiness of mind needful to devout meditation; by this the truth is impressed on our memories, and applied to our consciences and hearts. Prayer, the prayer of faith, alone can secure the aids of God's Holy Spirit; and while, on the one hand, he will communicate good only through the medium of the truth, so, on the other, the truth can only be effectual through his agency.

Be it recollected, also, that though, by searching the Scriptures and by pious reflection, we may provide, so to speak, the materials for faith, yet faith itself is a Divine gift. The mind may arrange itself for its reception, and may diligently and vigorously employ it when communicated; but the grace and power of faith can come from God alone.

Hence, while we employ all the means necessary to its improvement and increase, while we use the small measure of it which we possess, it is indispensable that there should be a direct application to the throne of grace, and a direct communication of God to the mind. The increase of faith, therefore, should form a subject of definite petition.

The same truth is to be recognised in our immediate endeavours for the correction and eradication of covetousness. It is our duty to employ every means likely to contribute to this design. In fact, apart from their use, no man can rationally expect success. Yet, after all, our resource is in God; and without his assistance, everything else, however judiciously contrived, will prove utterly abortive. He, therefore, who has a painful sense of this evil in his heart, should first apply to God, spread his case before him with all possible particularity of confession, plead the Divine promises, and then, in a spirit of simple and lively expectation, proceed to the employment of all remedial measures within his reach. Never did this plan fail of success. The Divine holiness, justice, fidelity, and love, yea all the attributes of the Infinite Mind, conspire to assure us against the possibility of disappointment. We may have long to persevere, and patiently to wait; our prayers may seem to be without avail, and without acceptance; and our unbelief, with its ever ready ally, the devil, may taunt us with the fruitlessness of our efforts. "But shall not God avenge his own elect, that cry day and night to him, though he bear long with them? I tell you he will avenge them speedily. He that shall come, will come, and will not tarry. God shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly."

More particularly, however, where covetousness prevails, we commonly perceive great servility of judgment upon the nature of true religion, and the extent of its privileges. Men are content to take the tone of their half-hearted and worldly associates, and to interpret Scripture by the wretched glosses of a lax and worldly spirit. But in order to a deliverance from the evil here considered, the christian must assume higher ground, and be independent of popular prejudices and preconceptions. The question for him to decide, is not what is the style of christianity which prevails among this or the other class of professors, but what does God require? to what does he invite? what is the testimony of his word? Independency of inquiry and decision is the first step to the discovery and attainment of the truth. Those who are content to remain on the dull level of the vulgar mind, are not the men to enlarge the range of our knowledge, moral or philosophic. The illustrious spirits who have made our sciences, modelled our philosophy, and supplied the most impressive patterns of virtue, have originated their eminence by withdrawing their minds from the judgment of the multitude, and daring to reverence the truth, though they might be alone in their homage. Of each it may be said,

“ His soul was like a star, and dwelt apart.”

The christian who ventures thus to think for himself, will soon perceive the necessity of a second step. He will assume a higher standard of religious character and experience than is generally agreeable to his associates among professors. It is a maxim, not very uncommon, but extremely delusive, and not fitted for human nature, that we should aim at

a degree of religious perfection, which we are, nevertheless, conscious we cannot possibly attain. All mere ideal christianity is worse than useless. It almost inevitably leads either to enthusiasm or to despondency. The sanguine and fanciful imagine it realized, and either go crazy outright, or become as full of spiritual pride. The thoughtful and sincere, seeing how far they fall short of its requisitions, are altogether discouraged, and are even led to cast away their confidence in God. No; we need no higher aim than the christianity of the New Testament. That we certainly may attain, and any habitual falling short of it is undoubtedly criminal. Let us be assured that our standard is that of the New Testament. A few may require a subtilized and sublimated pietism, inconsistent with man's nature and his social duties: but this is rare; the common mistake is on the other hand. The majority of professing christians are satisfied with less than the word of God demands; and this, therefore, is the error,—the error of defect and not of excess, against which our jealousy is specially required.

But while it is important that we should aspire to the utmost excellence of spiritual christianity, it is our wisdom to cultivate, with peculiar attention and care, those graces of the Spirit which are most decisively opposed both to the principles and practice of covetousness. Of these, christian joy may be cited as an eminent example. It would amply repay the believer, were he daily to devote a portion of time, longer or shorter, according to his circumstances, to the direct encouragement of this lovely and beneficial temper. Such an exercise would always lead the mind away from itself to its Saviour, from the world and sensible good to God and

heaven. And if the christian were thus perpetually to meditate on the causes which he has for rejoicing; if, under their influence, he were to resolve that he would "rejoice evermore," and that he would never be content to pass a day without accessions to his happiness, it is morally certain that all inordinate worldly affection would die within him, and his desires would anticipate "the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."

The actual opposition to covetousness, which is essential to its correction, may be considered either as self-denial in general, or as that particular branch of it which respects practical beneficence. Of both, Christ is to be our great example. The disposition to self-indulgence is to be rooted out by an appeal to the cross. We must regard our christianity as a voluntary and constant submission to it. Under its shadow are our hearts to seek refuge from self and sense. And who, with a vivid impression of his Saviour's sufferings, can allow the motions of worldly affection? Who, that has drunk largely of the spirit of Gethsemane and Golgotha, can love luxury and pomp? To the same design, it may not be unserviceable to contemplate at large the spirit of self-sacrifice, as exhibited in the higher order of christians, the men who at various periods have partaken most deeply and bitterly of the cup, and borne most fully the scourge, the thorn, and the cross of their enduring Master. Our martyrologies are full of appropriate examples, from the time when Stephen fell asleep with the accents of benevolence quivering on his lips, down to our own age, and the heroic spirits of modern missions, who, like him, have suffered and died in the fulness of unspeakable love to God and man. "Wherefore

seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before him, endured the cross despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God."

The duty of self-mortification, with special reference to the evil of covetousness, is affirmed by St. Paul, and that with peculiar emphasis. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry," Col. iii. 5. There is thus required of us, not only that we should avoid every incentive to this sin, but also that we should resolutely set ourselves to that course of conduct which is directly destructive to its very existence. He who would cease to be covetous, must perpetually thwart and cross the disposition. He who feels that he loves money too much, must act as if he did not love it at all. He must become increasingly and sacrificially beneficent. If he abandons no luxury, if he sacrifices no sensual indulgence, if he never denies himself that he may thus bless others, and only bestows his absolute superfluities upon the cause of God and the claims of the destitute, he neither rises to the elevation of evangelical beneficence, nor does what is required of him for the mortification of inordinate affection. This tampering with the sin is a discipline under which it will rather increase than decline, as a few drops of water cast upon a fire cause it afterwards to rage more fiercely. An inefficient and

restricted communication of property usually proves a sort of sedative to conscience, gives boldness and plausibility to the demands of covetousness, and almost inevitably leads to confirmed sensuality. There are many, of whom it is to be feared that they thus make beneficence the slave to their lust; and in parting with an inadequate proportion of their wealth, find a delusive sanction for inordinate complacency in what remains.

But if we would do justice upon our sin, we must compel it to penance upon the dolorous way of our Saviour's passion. We must crucify the old man with its affections and lusts. We must bear in our bodies the marks of the Lord Jesus. The badge of our profession must be carved on our dwellings, stamped on our furniture, embroidered on our garments, emblazoned with our arms, and, above all, graven on our hearts. "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world." To this voluntary assumption of the cross we have every encouragement. Our gracious God, for the correction of our sensuality, often sees it necessary to heap calamity upon our heads; and so closely do the mire and clay of this world adhere to us, that, in the process of cleansing, it is sometimes unavoidable that the flesh should be separated with it. The Divine chastisements frequently interfere with enjoyments, for the loss of which no conceivable riches could make amends: and he, who will make no proportionate sacrifice of property, for the honour of God and the mortification of his sin, is deprived of a darling child, or something yet more precious. His resistance to the demand upon the less valuable good renders

necessary some bereavement, which he would willingly have averted by the sacrifice of all his possessions. This is mercy, vast, unspeakable mercy ; but it is mercy which breaks the heart, and the heart that will not otherwise submit must be thus broken, or in its stubbornness given over to the worm that dieth not. It is, therefore, in some sort for us to choose, whether we will anticipate, and thus render needless, visitations so calamitous and desolating. And who, with the certainty of such an alternative, would hesitate voluntarily to assume the cross ? Who would not count its pains a happy exchange for griefs which will not terminate on this side the grave—for anguish and despair which will endure for ever ? In some cases, it is certain that we have to choose between sacrifice and perdition ; and, in many others, it is highly probable that the retention of our dearest delights depends upon our doing justice to our own spirits, and submitting them to the discipline which the gospel requires.

To render this the more easy, we should remember, that, as charity begins at home, in a man's own heart, so also does beneficence begin at home, in a christian's own closet. He who would do great good abroad, must commence his course by blessing men through the power of his intercessions. The fountains which most extensively refresh the desert and the solitary place, are such as spring up in secret oratories. He, whose daily devotions are impregnated with evangelical sympathy, will go forth into the world prepared to carry out the spirit of his petitions in active and even sacrificial beneficence. The necessity of thus interweaving the interests of mankind with our efforts for personal salvation, will be the more apparent when we

consider that we have to form a habit. A single burst of emotion, or a solitary act of munificence, however ardent the one, or abundant the other, will be altogether inadequate, either to the demands of duty, or to our own spiritual necessities. The lustre of our charity is not to be bright and evanescent, but steady and starlike. We must daily feed our fires in secret, and thus be prepared for the ungenial atmosphere in which we have to bear them.

But as the actual formation of any habit depends upon the repetition of single acts, the constant multiplication of sacrifices is essential to that of evangelical beneficence. The first may be costly and painful: but the love of Jesus is to be our resource and stimulus. "Consider him that endured such contradiction of sinners against himself, lest ye be weary and faint in your minds." As this divine habit becomes established, the power of covetousness will constantly decrease. As the house of David waxes strong, that of Saul will wax weak; until, at length, except in very rare cases, we shall not have to contend with any natural repugnance to these exercises. God will have all our hearts; and, even on earth, we shall enjoy and diffuse the bliss of paradise.

Before we finally dismiss the subject, may we be allowed to direct a few suggestions to the church of Christ, considered especially in its associate character? It is admitted that the correction of covetousness is an internal work, that it has its seat in the heart, and that it must be effected by individual christianity. But one of the most obvious designs of christian association is to afford external aids to personal piety. In such a case as the present, therefore, it is a question of great importance, whether

these might not be rendered more numerous and efficient. Is the state of religious society, and the style of christian ordinance, such as to supply the requisite facilities to the spiritualizing and elevation of character and experience? Especially, does there exist that distinct regard to the sin of covetousness, and that mutual co-operation for its correction, which its magnitude and prevalence require? These queries are offered with deep and affectionate concern, and it is confidently hoped that they will be received in a correspondent spirit.

In referring to the present state of the christian ministry, the writer is jealous over himself with a godly jealousy, lest, while suggesting what may possibly lead to its greater efficiency, any remark should occur, which, in the remotest degree, may seem to tend to its disparagement. Yet the most zealous and devoted servants of the Lord and of his church will be the first to welcome the aid and even the rebuke of the meanest, so far as either can be administered without injury to him who offers them. To such, the writer will venture to say what is in his heart, secure of their forgiveness, if not of their approbation.

May it not be questioned then whether the prevalent theology of the present day is sufficiently elevated to secure any extensive correction of that great evil which we have everywhere reason to lament? The obvious remedy of covetousness is "the love of God shed abroad in the heart, by the Holy Ghost given unto us." Is this a truth sufficiently recognised and insisted on? Are the representations on this subject, which we commonly receive from the pulpit, strictly in accordance with the spirit of the New Testament? Are we led to

look upon christian love as partaking essentially of the mind which was in Him, "who was rich, and who for our sakes became poor," as sacrificial and vicarious? Are we constantly instructed, that the demand of God is on "all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength?" Are christian congregations never allowed to remain content with something lower than this? Let us drop all terms belonging to a particular school of divinity, all controverted phrases, every thing which may waken the envy of Judah against Ephraim, and rest the matter on the requisitions of the New Testament. Nothing which is not to be found there can be rationally required either from the people, or from the ministry. Let every christian preacher only model his theology upon the prayer of St. Paul for the Ephesian saints, and nothing more can be desired on earth, nothing higher can be demanded by Heaven. "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height; and to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen."

Even where there exists an elevated standard of christian character, is there not often a great want of the simplicity for which the gospel is so remarkable? "Ask, and receive; believe, and be saved," is the style in which our gracious God invites our prayer and our faith. But in the expositions of such scriptures, are there none of the restrictions of diffidence? No qualifications to their breadth and fulness? No conditions annexed which go to neutralize their efficacy? Let us appeal to the views current among christian professors. There are probably few who will not allow that God has made sufficient provision for their happiness, but in general they either put the blessings they need at a distance so remote as to discourage the pursuit after them, or they argue, that, as the present is a state of trial, so of necessity their consolations must be few and occasional. The fountain of living waters they regard as remote and difficult of access, and they naturally seek for themselves the treacherous cisterns of worldly good. Is it not possible, in this respect, to render the ministry of the Word more efficient?

May it not also be doubted whether the style of the christian ministry is sufficiently pungent? The testimony of Scripture is that "the word of God is quick and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword?" But does it appear so in our churches? It is recorded as the result of the apostolic preaching, that multitudes "were pricked to the heart." Is this the effect of the declaration of the truth in our own times? Of one thing we may assure ourselves, that a ministry which does not produce this effect will prove altogether inadequate to the correction of covetousness. It is a sin so

subtle in its nature, so various in its forms, so plausible in its devices, so stupifying in its reaction, so popular in the world, and so prevalent in the church, as to demand a peculiarly earnest administration of the most pointed and awakening truths. It is presumption to expect the accompanying influences of the Holy Ghost, except where truth is thus adapted to the state of the hearers. Of his agency we are assured only in the employment of appropriate means. If the writer may be allowed to add the result of his own observation, one prevalent defect in pulpit labour is the absence of strong affirmation of evangelical morals. This, probably, originated in the salutary fear of rendering christian preaching merely didactic and ethical; but if our Lord's sermon upon the mount may be assumed as, in any degree, a model for his servants in after ages, it can hardly be doubted that the error now is in the other extreme. The consequence is, that the sin of covetousness, in common with many other offences against christian morality, comes in for a very small share of the denunciation which it merits. In discourses for charitable purposes, it is not unlikely that there has been too great solicitude for securing an agreeable present effect, so as to win a once the hearts and the contributions of the auditors; and these have, therefore, done little towards the correction of this evil. The frequency of such occasions has, perhaps, seemed a reason why subjects connected with christian beneficence, and the contrary sin, should, in general, be dismissed from the ordinary christian ministry; and thus, one of the most portentous and fatal evils which afflict the church has hitherto escaped exposure and reprobation.

But in order to the efficiency of the christian ministry, and the preservation of purity in the church of Christ, the maintenance of discipline is essential. A notoriously covetous man is, beyond doubt, a fit subject for church censure, and, if he remain impenitent, for utter excision. His sin is an offence as capital against the morals of the gospel, as was the worship of Baal against the laws of the jewish theocracy.

The individual christian is also bound to discountenance this evil. St. Paul requires us to refuse even to eat with "one called a brother," who is guilty of it. And, at least in the grosser instances of its indulgence, a conscientious adherence to the apostle's command would undoubtedly go far towards its correction. But if we not only connive at it, but place the offenders in situations of distinction in the church, it is plain that we do what we can to render both its detection and its abandonment increasingly difficult. Such measures go directly to neutralize the proper and salutary influence of the christian ministry. For of what avail is it to denounce the evil as one which will exclude from the glories of heaven, while the church here cherishes in its bosom the most heinous of its patrons? Is it not a terrible injustice to the souls of men thus to render the path to perdition smooth and inviting? Can we commit a greater wrong against God, than to refuse the due expression of our abhorrence of a sin which so directly dishonours his authority, and cripples his work? And can the church expect the prospering blessing of Heaven till judgment is executed upon the open and flagrant offenders in this sort?

In churches, as in individual christians, the effusion

of the Holy Spirit is essential to the correction of evil, and the establishment of an improved condition of religious character and attainment. Especially must we look to him, where, as in the present case, the specific object to be attained involves a peculiarly spiritualizing process. In order to secure his agency, it is first necessary to "put away our strange gods," and to cut off their worshippers from the people of the Lord. We are further required implicitly and fully to submit ourselves to the indications of his will, as already received. These, upon one subject, are written as with a sunbeam, and woe unto us if we refuse to read. He has instructed us in his design to bless the world through the medium of the church, and that as unequivocally as if to the ear of every christian man upon earth a living voice had declared it. Thanks be to God, we have not entirely disregarded his call. But have we not to confess and to bewail the inadequacy of our obedience? Look at the sacrifices of the votaries of pleasure. Look at the immense sums lavished on works of mere secular utility. In the one case, there is worse than a loss; in the other, the risk is not inconsiderable: while we, who are secured against all loss, whose success is certain, and whose reward is as certain as our success, often pause and pant in the midst of our enterprises, and, at the utmost, like the kine of the Philistines, lazily and reluctantly draw the ark of the Lord in its destined course. Let us take shame to ourselves for our past tardiness. Let us look abroad on the earth, and see the marvellous working of the providence of God in almost every region. Let us listen to the voices of entreaty, which come with every wave that chides our shores, and oh, let us be up and doing!

The destinies of millions await our mercy. We are the arbiters of their fate, in this life and beyond the grave. And if we resolutely push out our plans of beneficence, and apply our energies to give them all possible efficiency, the Holy Spirit will visit with richer energy and more abundant grace. "Bring ye all the tithes into the storehouse, and prove me now herewith, saith the Lord of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it," Mal. iii. 10.

Finally, to secure mutual and united intercession is one of the most prominent purposes of association in a christian community.

"Though private prayer be a brave design,  
Yet public hath more promises, more love."

"Whatsoever two of you shall agree to ask—Where two or three are gathered together;" so run the promises of our Lord. Plurality and combination will effect more than their arithmetical amount of good. Already for foreign lands have we sought the effusion of the Spirit; and lo, a nation is born in a day! Let us now meet our first obligations; let equal fervour, and faith, and persevering unity of purpose, mark our intercessions for the church of God at home. Let one specific object of our prayer be the convincing and refining agency of the blessed Spirit, in order to the correction of the great and crying sin of covetousness. And, oh! what an effect would be produced by even the partial success of our prayer in this behalf! There is not a realm of the earth, nor a cycle of eternity, on which its blessing would not rest. The administration of the truth would be powerful beyond all example, probably beyond all conception. Careless

and lukewarm professors would wake from their stupor with wonder and penitential shame. Men who, to hoary hairs, have fruitlessly heard the gospel preached, would tremble out of their secret places. The sanctuaries of God would be crowded with earnest and marvelling hearers. There would be the sighs of contrition in our chambers of commerce, and even the frozen heart of avarice would begin to thaw. A strange and startling revulsion would take place in the minds of men in general; our treasuries of benevolence would overflow with unwonted affluence; missionary sails would whiten every sea, and the voice of evangelic mercy and praise would be heard in every land.

THE END.

